



# Threads of Wisdom

*Real World Journeys to Leadership of  
Christian Women Marketplace Leaders,  
And Their Best Advice for  
Glorifying God in Your Calling*

Caroline A. Mendez, PCC, CCF



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# *Contents*

Preface.....	vii
Introduction.....	xi
Chapter 1 Shannon Miles.....	1
Chapter 2 Eleanor Morgan.....	10
Chapter 3 Beth Bragg Henon.....	19
Chapter 4 Janet Ward Black.....	33
Chapter 5 Deena Redding.....	40
Chapter 6 Cheryl DeLuca-Johnson.....	49
Chapter 7 Dr. Lori Salierno-Maldonado.....	57
Chapter 8 Cynthia Bertucci Kaye.....	70
Chapter 9 Sherri Hall.....	78
Chapter 10 Cheryl Bachelder.....	83
Chapter 11 Threads of Wisdom.....	91
Chapter 12 The Most Powerful Lessons from Their Mentors.....	94
Chapter 13 How They Learned Leadership.....	97
Chapter 14 Management Approaches.....	100
Chapter 15 Personal Management Philosophies.....	103
Chapter 16 Leadership Influences.....	106
Chapter 17 Faith-at-Work Practices.....	109
Chapter 18 What They Want Christian Businesswomen to Know.....	114
Chapter 19 What They Wish They Had Known at the Beginning of Their Careers.....	119
Chapter 20 So What's Next?.....	123
About the Author.....	127



## *Pre face*

The seed for this book was planted in 2006 after I (a confessed and proud New Age queen) was born again in an Atlanta evangelical church pew on Easter morning.

I spent the next several years learning more about Christ and growing in my relationship with him. I stopped working professionally and served others in our church and community.

I did every Bible class and study our church and community offered: women's Bible studies on how to be a good wife; a faithful, shepherding mother; a Proverbs 31 woman. Wonderful knowledge was acquired as I studied and applied the word from Bible Study Fellowship (BSF International) and a close-knit discipleship group. It was *wonderful*, but it didn't speak to all of me. And the part that consistently wasn't spoken to was the professional side of me, the Christian businesswoman side (which was, up until I was born again, a major part of who I was).

So in my curiosity and desire to know what I was to do with this part of me that was just dangling out there, the search began. It started on the Internet, Googling "Christian businesswomen" and "Christian women business groups." I came up with nothing but Joyce Meyer and Beth Moore. *Hmmmm*, I thought. *These are biblical women teachers and authors, not professional businesswomen.*

My search did lead to many Christian *businessmen's* groups and Bible studies. I visited many of the ones here in Metro Atlanta and found them to be wonderful communities with personal and professional fellowship. And 99 percent of the time, I was the only woman in an all-male room. All I kept thinking was, *Where are all the women? Where is our community?* I was to find out—there wasn't any.

In the spring of 2010, it was during prayer time that I asked (actually begged) God to give me work (not serving at church or making meals for new moms) that would use my passion for working women and my new identity in Christ. In answer was the message “Feed my daughters.” The picture that accompanied it was a beautiful banquet table full of bountiful food where businesswomen were joyfully gathered. It had the feel of a Christ-filled executive meeting but with joy and transparency. And so the first part of this work began launching in 2011, bringing Christian businesswomen into community in monthly peer-advisory roundtables.

From 2011 to 2015, we built groups of Christian businesswomen, forming what we liked to call “business discipleship” groups. Our purpose was to provide support to women who wanted to integrate their faith and work, share their business experience, learn from one another, and grow as godly business leaders.

As these women came together, their stories began to unfold as they deepened their relationships. They shared common issues of isolation, struggles, disappointments, roadblocks, challenges, and mistakes. Along with these stories, their tenacity and strength, God’s grace, the process of redemption, and the Lord’s leading, his blessings and guidance shone through. These beautiful songs were feeding the women who were hearing them. You could almost hear deep sighs being released from the depths of their souls. They were realizing, as they listened to each other, that they were not alone—there were other women in the marketplace leading and building teams, businesses, nonprofits, and schools; they were serving in governments of every shape and size; and they no longer had to go it alone.

Not all but many of us are specifically called to work, to be in the marketplace, and to lead there. Whether it is for a season or a lifetime.

These women, like you, are where they are for such a time as this. It isn’t an accident, punishment, good fortune, or luck. God placed each of us where we are right now for his highest and best purpose.

And so the collection of these women's stories began. My hope is that this is the first in a series of books *from* Christian businesswomen *to* Christian businesswomen.

The purpose is to give each other hope and to share our unique wisdom (the *threads\** of knowledge that come from our experience) for your present and future. These are perhaps, the learnings of those further along the path, which we intend to sew into the next generation of Christian businesswomen.

This first book contains true stories of faith-based leadership by "successful" (significant in eternal terms) women. Each of their stories include how they got there, how they lead, and what advice they want to pass along to their fellow Christian businesswomen. May their stories glorify God and empower you, our fellow sister in Christ, in the marketplace.

For my sisters in Christ leading and working their callings,

Caroline Mendez  
November 27, 2017

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (Col. 3:23 NIV).

\*The name *threads* came out of a brainstorming session with several of the women from the book. It speaks of not only the wisdom being handed down from older women to younger women but also the common threads through most of the women's stories of the similar advice they had to share.



# *In t r o d u c t i o n*

Have you ever wanted to pin down a leading Christian businesswoman and ask her your most burning questions?

- ❖ How did you get where you are?
- ❖ Who helped you?
- ❖ What's your background?
- ❖ Where is your faith in all this?
- ❖ What's your best piece of advice?

What if someone interviewed top-level, experienced Christian businesswomen leaders and asked them the questions you most wanted to know?

Well, that's what happened here, because there was no documented information anywhere to be found. And I had a hunch other CBWs (Christian businesswomen) were searching for it too. (For more on why the book was written, please read the preface.)

Here's how the book is structured.

The book is written in interview style, and there is one businesswoman's story per chapter.

Chapters 1-10 follow the same format:

- the woman's life story (where she grew up and her education, first jobs, and so forth) and her path to leadership
- her "thoughts on leadership" section:
  - most powerful lessons from her mentors
  - ways she learned leadership

- her management approach
- her personal management philosophy
- who most influenced her leadership?
- section on faith-at-work practices
- section on what she wants other Christian businesswomen to know
- section on what she would like to have known at the beginning of her career

Then in chapter 11, their collective wisdom is summarized into a matrix, where the common threads among all the women's knowledge are pulled together and organized.

In chapters 12-19, the responses to questions from each CBW's story are compiled under each question. For example, you can see all the women's combined wisdom on the topic of faith-at-work practices in chapter 17.

To my knowledge (and I have been searching for ten-plus years), this is the first documented and published body of work of knowledge from Christian businesswomen. The purpose in saying this is to perhaps impart the uniqueness of the sources, knowledge, information, and wisdom contained in these pages.

It is my fondest hope that in reading, contemplating, and praying about what you have read, you will commit (or recommit) your professional life to the Lord to honor him with your work.

For more ideas on what to do with the enclosed wisdom and how to apply it, please see the last chapter, "So What's Next?"



**COO and cofounder:** Shannon Miles

**Organization:** Miles Advisory Group: MAG Bookkeeping, eaHELP (now known as Belay Solutions)

**Industries:** Bookkeeping, executive assistance, staffing

**Year established:** 2010

**Organization size:** \$5 to \$7.5 million (2015)

**Their mission:** Miles Advisory Group (and/or its brands) exists to glorify God by sourcing people and services that ignite a leader's possibilities and results.

### *Th e S T o r y*

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Shannon's story begins in Ohio in 1977, when she was the product of divorce at the age of four. Her mother remarried, and their family became a military one, moving to North Carolina, Louisiana, and then South Carolina. In South Carolina, when she was thirteen, she and her parents came to Christ when her parents sought counsel from a Christian couple they admired. Shannon's family moved back to Ohio a couple of years after losing their home in Hurricane Hugo.

She immediately went to Mount Vernon Nazarene College following high school and double-majored in psychology and business with the intent of going to law school. This was where she met and married her husband, Bryan Miles.

Bryan and Shannon married after her sophomore year in college. Upon graduating in 1999, she and Bryan moved to Atlanta at the height of the dot-com boom.

Shannon says her first real job was working for a law firm. From there, she was able to get a job at a Fortune 500 health-care information technology solutions company as a contract specialist, writing contracts for the sales team.

Shannon was probably the youngest person in the contract review department when she started in 2000. Eager and bold, she kept seeking opportunities until she landed a job leading women twice her age as an assistant manager.

Years later, she went back and talked to her previous boss, who promoted her during that season. Shannon asked her, "Why did you do that? Why did you take a chance on me?"

She just said, "I knew you were special. I knew you could do it."

On the personal side, in 2005 Shannon and Bryan started talking about expanding their family. Little did they know that the birth of their daughter would be the catalyst for eaHELP and its larger mission to give women "a third option" in employment.

After the birth of their daughter, Rainey, Shannon took a three-month maternity leave, then went back to work full-time, employing a nanny, but that just wasn't what they wanted for their family. With both Bryan and Shannon in sales, the demanding travel schedule for two parents with an infant created more stress than they wanted.

Sm. And at that time, I thought, *Okay, the option is to work full-time or stay home full-time.* So I thought, *Well, working's not working, so I'm going to stay home.* While I was on leave, the company appointed a project manager to backfill what I was doing, and it was a part-time position. And so when I came back, I said to my boss, "I want to do *that.*" (I was doing it anyway. It was part time. Let me just get through this mess of a conversion. "I'll get paid out my back commission, and I'll be done.") And he said no. I thought, *Okay, that's not what God told me.* Because truly, Caroline, in my life that was one of the most—probably one of the first but clearest callings I felt from God. Like God said to me, "You need to go part-time. This is the right next step for you; we'll figure out the rest." And my boss said no. And I thought, *Well, you weren't supposed to say no.*

I didn't like that answer, and so I went to his boss, Mark, and I said, "Mark, I want to do this."

And he said, "Okay, let's make it work."

And I said, "Okay." That's the answer I was looking for. So that's how I ended up doing a twenty-hour-a-week position at the company, which leads into what we're doing today and why I'm so passionate about it. Once I got into the part-time work, I realized I never wanted to stay at home in the first place. This was the perfect fit for me.

That whole experience of going from full-time to working part-time transformed into the option we give women around the country today, the opportunity to not have to make the choice between working full-time and staying home and not contributing financially. We've provided this third option that allows them the best of both worlds—a legitimate work-from-home opportunity where they can use their minds and the gifts that God has given them, their professional experience, but still keep their families first. And that's huge. That

changed the trajectory

of my life and, Lord willing, the lives of all the women who work with us.

In 2010, Bryan and I individually felt like God was calling us to make a big change in our careers. We've always wanted to own something of our own, but we weren't exactly sure what that should be. Bryan worked in the construction industry for churches and had a lot of interaction with pastors who needed help in the area of executive assistance. With my background in legal, contract management, sales, and project management, I was very comfortable in the operations space.

So we had this idea—to offer virtual executive assistance to pastors. We knew this could be a very difficult niche to fill, but there was also a huge need. Bryan had a great experience working with a virtual executive assistant for a number of years. So in 2010, we started Miles Advisory Group, offering executive assistants, or EAs, to pastors across the country. In early 2011, we added bookkeeping as a service. We intended to stay focused on the church world, but something kind of big happened in 2011 that changed our minds.

In July 2011, we were on vacation, driving from Salt Lake City, Utah, to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where Bryan was going to climb the Grand Teton with a friend.

During the drive, we saw on Twitter a nationally known author and speaker say, "Hey, I'm looking for a virtual assistant. Anybody have any experience?" And a few of our clients responded and said, "Yeah, we use MAGea. Talk to Bryan." And you know, this man is a very influential person in our industry, and so for him to reach out, we were like, "Yeah, he's not a pastor, but he gets the church, and he's worked in this area for a long time." So after a very quick sales cycle, we got started with him. It was just one of those turning points in our business where, over the course of working with him, it raised awareness that there are actually a ton of leaders outside the church we can serve and not deviate too much from our core and what we know we're good

at. That's where the rebranding in 2011 came in with the conversion of MAGea to eaHELP. So in January 2012, eaHELP was officially launched as a brand focused on businesses, and it just took off.

Cm. Would you share when you started, what your revenue was, and where you are now?

Sm. In 2010 we had three or four contracts, so teeny, tiny revenue. And then in January, when we got started with the bookkeeping business, there was a good funnel of opportunity. And as it turns out, MAG Bookkeeping actually fueled our business for 2011 because we signed a lot of clients very quickly, and I think we were still maybe six figures and then in revenue for that year. But then the momentum with eaHELP really took hold, and now it's 80 percent of our business, whereas MAG Bookkeeping is 20 percent. We closed out 2014 at right around \$5 million in revenue.

### *Thoughts on Leadership*

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Over the years, Shannon had several women mentors, especially during her time at the sales management level while at the health-care IT company. She looked for women she liked and who did their jobs really well. Her approach was “Teach me” and “Here is what I will give back to you.”

#### *The Most Powerful Lessons from Her Mentors*

- “Just do what you say you’re going to do. It speaks to your credibility, to your commitment, and to how you value that person.”
- “To actually care about people. And that’s natural for me; I do that anyway. I’m a high S. (S = steady—passive in the DISC personality profile assessment). I’m always concerned about what other people think. When you establish those relationships in business, they afford you the opportunity to be real and make mistakes but without condemnation.”

## *The Ways She Learned Leadership*

- She always sought out people who were smarter than she was to learn from. She was always looking to people who had been doing what she was doing much longer and much better than she was and learning from them.
- She read and had quarterly book studies with her team on business books.
- She often had a mentor (either a one-on-one mentor or a roundtable of peers).
- She sought out peer-group settings with like-minded people who challenged her.

## *Her Management Approach*

- Her approach is based on five key values: God, team, gratitude, passion, and vision.
- Their values and mission are lived out and modeled every day. She and Bryan intentionally create a culture where every team member can speak about the company values (what they mean) and give practical examples of how he or she has seen them lived out.
- Their company isn't satisfied with the status quo.

## *Her Personal Management Philosophy*

- She focuses on empowering each team member, continually ensuring he or she has goals, and doing everything she can to help members meet their goals.
- She is open and honest with each team member and balances that quality with credibility.
- She believes leaders ask questions (and managers answer them).
- She doesn't believe she has all the answers.

## *Who Most Influenced Her Leadership?*

- When it comes to who has influenced her leadership the most, she points to Jesus. Her approach and posture are of a servant-leader—in serving not only her staff but also the clients and partners of MAG.
- An academic essay, “Servant as Leader,” by Robert Greenleaf (<https://greenleaf.org/products-page/the-servant-as-leader/>) is required reading for all staff members at MAG.
- Her female mentors (women managers and senior saleswomen) at the health-care IT solutions company also influence her.

## *Faith-at-Work Practices*

When it comes to faith at work, the staff pray openly and often in their team, leadership, and corporate meetings. She personally prays for her team members. When Shannon and Bryan have big decisions through the course of the weeks, months and years, they pray together over them.

They are up front in their hiring process when screening applicants. As they like to say, “You don’t have to be a Christian to join our team, but this is what we do, and this is how we do it, so it can’t be offensive to you.”

Early on, she says, she had an opportunity to share her faith and blew it when she was working at the health-care IT company.

Sm. It was a corporate environment, and we live in the South, so talking about your faith is acceptable and common, but I don’t think I was as overt about it as I should have been. So one of the things, I think, my boss saw in me was the ability to be calm in the face of pressure. And we were in a tough negotiation via conference call, and I have a tendency to talk people off the ledge, like, “Let’s methodically figure this out, and it’s not the end of the world.”

One of the senior leaders said, “How are you so calm? Where do you get your peace from?” And how perfect of a question is that?

And I was thinking, *Jesus Christ—that’s the right answer*. That’s the answer I had in my head; it is not the answer I said aloud because I was trying to be PC, and I missed a really cool opportunity to be overt about my faith. I’ll never forget that, and I never let that happen again. You know, it was like the perfect tee up, and the Holy Spirit was saying, “Jesus Christ—say it!” And I was thinking, *Ah!* But I said, “I don’t know. I’m just really calm.” It was the worst answer ever.

Personally, as a leader, she cites her Called4women’s<sup>1</sup> group (a monthly Christian businesswomen’s executive roundtable) as the most consistent practical integration point she uses to view her leadership through the filter of faith and make sure, if there’s anything off, it gets recalibrated.

### *What She Wants Other Christian Businesswomen to Know*

- “Women sometimes have to have all the answers in order to take action, and that’s not life, and that’s not fair because God teaches us all along the way. We get paralyzed by this need to look like we have it all together, to look like we’ve got all the answers—that never-let-them-see-you-sweat kind of thing because it’s scary when you’re vulnerable. But if you do it in an appropriate way, there’s a lot of strength in that. Just have direction and a good compass to say where you’re off, that the Lord can lead and direct you as you move.”
- “Just get out there and try it and don’t be afraid to fail. How do you even know if it’s going to work until you get out there and start trying it? I remember days of scraping up change to buy bread growing up. So for me, I had nothing to lose. I already have now more than I ever could have imagined in my entire life. So what’s the harm in going out there and trying something new?”

## *What She Would Like to Have Known at the Beginning of Her Career*

- Knowing the importance of having somebody who believes in you. “You’ve got to have people in your corner who support you. And it’s funny; when you put it out there, you find them.”
- “Trying to do everything on our own is futile. Find somebody who’s going to be in your corner; just know it’s going to change over time as God progresses you through your career.”
- “Be humble and willing to learn, course-correct, and dream big. Also, it’s super cliché, but if your dreams don’t scare you, they’re not big enough. And I am not a dreamer. I’m not. I’m learning to be, because I’m learning that God has bigger things for me than I could have imagined for myself, so why limit him?”



businesswomen leaders, who met monthly in peer advisory boards to grow their organizations and leadership skills to God's glory.



**President and CEO, cofounder:** Eleanor Morgan

**Organization:** MD&E Clarity

**Industry:** IT staffing

**Year established:** 1992

**Organization size:** \$5 million to \$10 million (2015)

**Their mission:** To build long-term relationships with its clients and to provide ongoing technology services and resources

### *Th e S T o r y*

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Eleanor grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, the daughter of an air force father and stay-at-home mother. She says her family was very middle class, and she grew up in a blue-collar neighborhood, where the church was at the end of the street and the local grocery store was a block or two away. They lived in an eight-hundred-square-foot house with three children and one bathroom. They walked everywhere they needed to go, and her mother never drove a car until Eleanor became a teenager.

She was raised in an era where young women were expected to get married and maybe work as a secretary or teacher, but college wasn't encouraged.

Her first job at eighteen was working for an insurance company as a typist for underwriting policies.

Em. After six months at the insurance company, I got an opportunity with an electrical apparatus shop that really catapulted my career. My mother's friend married a man who owned the business, and she wanted somebody to come in and help her. She hired me, and she was my first mentor. I didn't understand at the time that she was my mentor, but she was.

I would take care of the receivables, process bank deposits, pay the bills, and do whatever needed to be done while they traveled (their priority at the time).

Three years later they sold their company to an investment company, and they asked me to stay on as the office manager. They wanted to grow and groom this company to merge it again. I learned so much from those accountants. They actually tried to get me to go back and take a test to go to work for them in the accounting firm, but that's not what I wanted to do. I liked numbers, but I didn't want to do that all the time. So I stayed with the investment company for about three years; they prepped the company to sell it, and they sold it to Emerson Electric. So that was the first opportunity I got to see a big corporation, and they had people coming and going all the time. I was maybe twenty-five years old by then, and they asked me to stay on and be the controller for what they wanted to build, which would be the southeastern repair shop. And they put me through a lot of training to get some skills I didn't have. And so I became in charge of the P & L (profit and loss) for nineteen different service repair centers.

Cm. So you took the controller job ...

Em. I did. Never had a second thought about it; didn't think about being afraid or anything. And I did take it, and I poured myself into that. But I just really let myself get out of balance in my life and work. I was a young mother; my daughter was probably two years old then, and I really worked more than I should have. I know that now, looking back. I think that's why I have such a heart for young women who have small children, and they're trying to work because I understood that something had to give back then. And I let a lot of my home duties go instead of doing them as well as my marriage because I wanted to be successful at work.

Cm. So how did you come to own your own company?

Em. It was 1981. My husband, Charles, and I met at an electric company; Charles was raised here in Georgia and went to Georgia Tech, so he wanted to get back to Atlanta. He got an opportunity with a nursing care company to come to Atlanta. So we came here, and I had no job, and he did, and I knew nobody here. I look back now and think, *Wow, that was just blind faith right there.*

So anyway, I found somebody here who had a construction company, and they needed accounting and project management. So I did that for a while to be at home with my daughter. For the next three years, Charles worked for the nursing care company. They then moved their office to a town in Arkansas, and we didn't want to go. So we opened up a construction business here.

And then Charles had a heart attack, so he couldn't go out and do what he was doing with the construction company. That forced me to go out and look for a job. And that's how I got started. I had no intention of building a business; I was just looking for an income, and I had a prayer partner at this small church I was going to, and she said, "We need some people here at the telecom company." So I started working for ten dollars an hour, doing data management. And from there, God knew Charles and I needed an income, but I had no idea he had a lot more in store for me. So I just worked hard and eventually realized they were paying a lot of money to other contractors they weren't getting quality

work from. So I approached the IT director and told her I would like to bid on this work and bring people in. I would give them the same price and manage the team myself. And it scared me to death to do that because I thought maybe they were going to tell me they didn't want me, but it really was a win-win situation for them. They had already seen my quality of work and knew my character, and so I could bring other people like that. And that's how it got started in 1994.

During this time, everything was becoming a software program. So in understanding the data, I had leverage in helping develop applications and understood how they used the data in business, and I taught other people I brought into the company those same things. That's really how we started growing. Five years later, we were at fifteen people when a big opportunity that scared me to death came along. I did it, and it was really a launching point for me. The CIO for the telecom company asked me to come in and be the business initiative manager for an application they were going to use in the field. It was unheard of to ask a contractor to lead an initiative like that, but he felt like I had the best qualifications. And that's what branched us out into IT, business analysis, and CRM (customer relationship management) systems.

Cm. Were there any epiphanies you experienced in your career? Any watershed moments that really impacted your choices?

Em. When I first started the business, I really didn't act like I was the owner of the business; that was never important to me. It was what we could get done as a team. So as we started to really grow to about fifty people, I began to realize boundaries are important—I had actually bought a beach condo and was very open about what was going on in my life, so I sent an e-mail to the staff that I would be vacationing at the beach. One of the kids who worked for me—and he just wasn't thinking—did a “reply all,” and he said, “Well, I guess she's living off of our backs down there, enjoying herself at the beach while we're here working hard.”

And, you know, that hurt. And it really made me grow up,

because I realized that's not for them to say, and I went back to him. And I

didn't fire him like he thought I would. I said, "I'm sorry you feel that way because I've worked really hard to build this business and create jobs for each one of you, and that's my purpose here, to keep you working." And so, like I said, it forced me to start protecting myself from everybody knowing everything about me. And that enabled me to choose a different way to present myself. Not that I didn't care about them, but I couldn't expect everybody to think along the same lines I do.

## *Thoughts on Leadership*

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### *The Most Powerful Lessons from Her Mentors*

- "Don't take things at face value; ask questions to understand. For example, with an expense report, it wasn't just the number but what the purpose was behind it, and did this make common sense that it would cost that much? She taught me to really probe down to make sure that whatever I was doing, I understood completely before I signed off on it."

### *The Ways She Learned Leadership*

- God gave her skills and sent people to help bring those skills about. "Now, I always prayed that he would help me be the person that he created me to be, and that's still one of my prayers. And by doing that, I guess it released the ability for him to send those people, and I was open to them."
- Reading personal growth books, business books, articles, trade magazines

### *Her Management Approach*

- Stay humble.
- "It's not about me; it's about honoring God with my work."

- Integrity
- Honesty

Cm. Was there a particular event when you realized, *Oh! I'm not a manager. I'm actually a leader?*

Em. Yes. And one of the scariest. When we first got our office building, we had a family Christmas party with Santa Claus and gifts for all the kids with the families to make them feel like part of the company. And I had a pastor friend; he and his wife dressed up and told the Christmas story, and all the little kids were sitting around the floor. It was so crowded, and I looked over them, and God just impressed on my heart, *Eleanor, you're responsible for taking care of these people, and your decisions impact their lives. It's not just the person working for you; you're impacting these people's lives. If you've got them working on Saturday, their families are missing out on things.* And I think it just hit me that this was more about leadership of people than just managing a person.

### *Her Personal Management Philosophy*

- Have your employees' best interests at heart. Then your team will follow because they want to.
- Being transparent. "You have to be transparent in your thinking. I would tell my staff: *I'm following God, and I'm waiting on him to help me make this decision. You need to come follow me when he tells me where we're going, or We're going here because this is what we need to be doing,* and I truly believe that God leads us that way."

### *Who Most Influenced Her Leadership?*

- God. "It's not my journey; it's God's journey. I'm on the journey, but he's the one who has prepared me for every step along the way."

- Her prayer partner. “She worked with the Salvation Army during Hurricane Katrina, so she’s got a lot of stories, but she

really motivated me by telling me constantly, 'Eleanor, you've got so much more to give than you're giving. You're limiting yourself.' And she would tell me that all the time. And finally, one day I began to believe her. And she would say, 'Ask for what you need. Don't be afraid. Ask for what you need. Don't ask for more but always ask for what you need, and God will find a way to give it to you.'"

### *Faith-at-Work Practices*

How she came to Christ: Eleanor came to know the Lord at the age of six and then helped bring her parents and family to Christ.

Em. I remember being about six years old, and I had some neighbors who went to church, and I wanted to go to church, but nobody in my family went. They would take me to church with them, and I would beg my parents to go, and eventually I guess I wore them down, so they all started going. So my mom and my dad were both baptized. I really was the first Christian in our family at the age of six, but I was also the oldest child, so that's probably not surprising. And I just always felt at home in God's house; he called me early. I'm not sure I understood what it meant to follow him, but I knew I wanted to be a Christian; I wanted to be one of God's children.

- Take your business prayer list before God. "I'm always bringing that in front of God, saying, 'This is what I'm asking you to do for your business.' And remembering that it's not about me; it may not be what 'me' wants to do, but if he's urging me to go in that direction, that's where I should be going to lead the business or to lead my family."
- Constantly being in prayer. "I believe that you have to have almost constant prayer—constant communication. And it's something that God built into me early. And when I face something I'm not sure about, I'm always saying, 'God, give me the right word, give me the wisdom, and help me do this.'

I don't know how to do this; give me the wisdom I need to do it.”

- Dedicated alone time with the Lord using a journal to document the dialog. “You have to have a time that's set aside where you truly communicate with God about what you need and what you want to offer him, that you're here for him, and these are my thoughts. I use a journal, often using a blank journal page to record our interaction. And I incorporate that into my leadership because I pray over the decisions that I make.”

### *What She Wants Other Christian Businesswomen to Know*

- “Stretch yourself. They need to be all they can be while keeping that balance in their lives. Join professional organizations and volunteer for nonprofit projects that challenge and stretch you.”
- “Enjoy and feed the relationships in your life. Leadership is hard, and building a business is hard, but if you'll enjoy those relationships, those are the good things God gives you while you're working through the hard. He gives you people who love you and have a heart for God just like you, and you need to develop, retain, and lean on those people.”
- “God is faithful. I would want them to always remember that.”
- “Failure will not kill you. It makes you stronger.”
- “Understand the fundamentals of the financials of your business. That is so important for every woman to understand. And if you want to be successful, you've got to be able to read a P & L and a balance sheet, and do forecasting. You can't just hope it all works out and think, *Well, I must have made money because I've got money in the bank*, because that's not the way that works.”

### *What She Would Like to Have Known at the Beginning of Her Career*

About the importance of balancing your work, family, and marriage.  
"I would have liked somebody to come along beside me and say, 'Eleanor, you know, it's not all about work just because you have this

opportunity. You've got to look at your family, you've got to look at your marriage, you've got to look at everything, and you've got to balance that somehow.' I never had that person until I really had kind of figured it out on my own."





**President:** Beth Bragg Henon

**Organization:** Bragging Rights

**Industry:** Public relations

**Year established:** 2012

**Organization size:** One to ten employees (2017)

**Their mission:** It helps clients understand and articulate their brand and unique story, prompting key audiences to do their bragging for them.

### *Th e S T o r y*

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Beth grew up in a small town in central Florida, called Leesburg, with her parents and older sister. She grew up on the water, spending afternoons out in the boat (a very small, humble boat) they called the Big Six because it had a six-horsepower motor.

She grew up in a Christian household. Her parents never forced her to go to church, but even on weeks when no one else in the family could attend services, Beth found herself going. She could walk there from her house. While walking home from church one day, she decided

to

ask Jesus into her heart, follow him, and enjoy intimate relationship with him when she was twelve; and per Beth, "We have been a team ever since."

Cm. Tell me about what you wanted to do when you were growing up. What did you want to do with your life?

BH. My parents are both educators. My father championed vocational education in this country and built a vocational center in our small but growing central Florida area. My mom was a schoolteacher— teaching third grade for half of her career and teaching adults at the vocational center for the last half. So my sister and I started having conversations with our parents about education and career from the time I can remember being on the planet. There was something in me that felt like I needed to decide what I wanted to do for a profession by the time I graduated from junior high. Go figure. I was determined to pinpoint what I wanted to do for a living because I didn't want to waste any time. I wanted to direct all my education, experiences, and extracurricular activities toward a career goal so I could be the very best at my profession as quickly as possible.

My mom was very good at helping me, as a young person, determine what I loved, what I was gifted in, and what I might be good at. So I surveyed careers and in the seventh grade took some career tests. I realized I was passionately interested in so many things and couldn't narrow it down. So in light of that, I thought, *What's a career where I can engage in the widest variety of experiences possible and be in the middle of lots of worlds at the same time?* I realized that would be news reporting. As a reporter, one day I could be doing stories on farming and be a farmer; I could do stories on medical issues and be a doctor; I could do stories on politics and be a politician. So I decided that I would be a television news reporter. At that time, in 1977, television was the edgy, new medium, and there weren't many women doing it.

Cm. Okay, so you graduated from high school in your hometown in 1981. Where did you go to college?

BH. I grew up in a very small, quiet, wholesome hometown; and now I had this dream of being a network television news reporter and doing *60 Minutes* and *Today Show* kind of stuff. I didn't know anybody who did that kind of thing. I looked for which colleges bred great broadcast journalists, and there weren't many schools at the time with that major. Most television reporters at that time were former print reporters, so I ended up selecting the University of South Carolina for my undergrad degree for two reasons: one, it had a uniquely strong broadcast journalism program; and two, I wanted to have an adventure. I wanted to challenge myself to go to a school where I didn't know anyone in a state very different from my home state. I wanted something totally out of my realm of experience, and I thought South Carolina would be a nice dose of traditional southern life after growing up in progressive Florida.

Cm. So you went for a degree in?

BH. I went for a bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism and ultimately got a master's degree in journalism from Ohio State. I studied abroad in England, and I did internships before I went to college. Even in my small town, there was a tiny commercial production company. There was a little Christian television station and some radio stations, so anywhere I could get my feet wet and get some hands-on experience, I did.

Cm. Where was your first job?

BH. While I was looking for television jobs, I remember being envious of business majors because there was a clear-cut career path. You could go to the career fairs, and potential employers were there to recruit you, and all you had to do was hand them a résumé with your internships and good grades. Well, I had a strong résumé, but the TV news field was flooding with everybody wanted to do "this glamorous TV stuff," so television stations never came looking for you; you had to hunt them down. And not only did you have to have the great résumé, but you had to have a demo reel showing news stories you had already done.

So I loaded up in my little Mazda 626 with my résumés and a dozen demo tapes that contained my blood, sweat, and tears. I drove all over the Southeast, interviewing with television stations, and finally landed a television job in Charleston, South Carolina, at the NBC affiliate there. This was market number 100—there are 212 television markets in the country. And they didn't have a reporting job available, but they had an opening in the Promotions Department. I didn't even know what that was, but it was a foot in the door, and I thought the skills I would pick up in this one-off job would benefit me once I was able to become a news reporter. And sure enough, within a year I was able to take on a job few others wanted—weekend weather. I got paid five dollars per show. Eventually, I began slipping in feature stories (for no extra pay) to demonstrate my skills, and sure enough, when a reporting position opened up, I applied, and they moved me over into full-time reporting and eventually morning news anchor.

Cm. So tell us how your career progressed. Do you remember your first leadership role?

BH. Yes, my first leadership role was at twelve years old as co-captain of the cheerleading squad at Leesburg Junior High. In everything I was involved in from junior high on, I seemed to end up being the leader, not because I wanted to have that title or felt like that was some sort of ego thing. In fact, it used to embarrass me to be highlighted as the leader. I used to vote for others to win the leadership roles rather than voting for myself. I remember being voted in as varsity cheerleading captain as a junior rather than a senior getting the role. Usually the captain would have embroidered on her cheerleading jacket "Beth—Captain." Well, I didn't want to do that. I remember asking the embroiderer to leave off "Captain" and just put "Beth."

My first work-related leadership role was in my second job. I was twenty-three years old and hired to be a producer of a weekly news magazine show. The producer is the leader of the show. You determine the content of the show, delegate tasks, oversee research, write, and produce. And in this case, I was an on-air

reporter for the show as well.

Everybody who worked with me on that particular show had been at the station for many years and was at least fifteen to twenty years older than I was.

Cm. Was there a moment in your career when you knew you were a leader as opposed to just a manager of people? Was there an event that happened when you thought, *Oh, leadership is this?*

BH. I've always taken opportunities to lead, whether they were in the workplace or not. So I was leading Bible study groups or community efforts and leading and influencing in my personal life as well as professional life. So a turning point for me was when I heard an executive coach speak at a Kiwanis meeting I went to. (It was you, and I think you were a fill-in at the last minute, and you threw together a program I thought was very good). And so I contracted with this executive coach to help me figure out how to manage all my responsibilities I currently had and manage my dreams better and be intentional about the direction I was moving in. And this coach laid it on the line and asked me, "Do you want to continue being successful in leading the troops on the field, or do you want to be an executive and lead from an executive level?" And for me, it was kind of like, *Do you want to stay the field commander and work alongside the troops, or do you want to be the strategist in the war room?* And that was the right question at the right time.

I remember saying, "I don't want to stop doing PR. I love it, I'm good at it, it's a good thing." But I was in my mid-thirties, and that was a good time to evaluate, *What do I want leadership to look like going into the next decade of my life?* And that was a turning point for me when I decided, *Yes, this is good for now. I'm happy now. But five or ten years down the road, leadership for me probably needs to be happening from an executive level.*

Cm. How did you foster your leadership? Where did you hone and refine it, and how did you do so?

BH. As is true for most people, I have worked under effective

and ineffective leaders, and I watched them intently. I listened to them and questioned them about why and how. How did that turn out? And

what makes you do this well? What keeps you from doing this better? Reading is good, and I will always pull nuggets from a book. But for me, the real training and life change and skill building come from watching, listening, questioning, and being mentored. And not just letting the mentoring happen organically but seeking it out. It does happen both ways.

I remember praying for a mentor about fifteen years ago because there was nobody in my space. I was a woman with traditional values leading a very nontraditional life. I was in my late thirties, single, a Christian woman in the often-liberal, mainstream media, living a fast-paced lifestyle with high-profile work and international travel, and serving in an executive leadership role.

And I looked around to find a woman who was five or ten years ahead of me who could mentor me. And there weren't any. And I thought, *Well, Oprah would be good.* She was about the closest thing, but she wasn't available. At this time, I was serving on a board with a brilliant former leader in human resources for Procter & Gamble. He was large in stature and in personality, dynamic and in great demand. He just started talking with me, calling to check in with me, and asking me about my career to encourage me. And I remember thinking, *Wow, he would be a great mentor, but he doesn't look anything like Oprah. And he's such a heavy hitter. I wouldn't want to presume on his time.* But finally one day God gave me a much-needed wake-up call; I was getting ready for work, and God said, "Beth, you have been asking me for a mentor for years. I have sent you the best of the best, and yes, I have sent him to you. Say yes! Say yes! He is offering to spend time with you. Say yes!" So I did.

And I also have had several woman mentors, including one I call my beautiful "shampoo and set" mentor—a "steel magnolia" powerhouse who had an influential interior design company; and because of her total commitment to use her life for Christ, she is passionate about mentoring. She has even written a book on the importance of mentoring called *Guardians at the Gate*.

Cm. How did you get from being at a leading Christian PR firm to owning your own PR firm?

BH. The shift from seventeen years of helping lead a national PR firm from atop my Peachtree Street, Atlanta, high-rise office overlooking Neiman Marcus to running a boutique consultancy from my gravel road, mountaintop office overlooking the Cumberland Gap really came by necessity more than from a long-term strategic plan. I made a big personal life change at the age of forty-seven. After living most of my life as an upwardly mobile, globe-trotting single professional, I—in one afternoon—became the wife of a Tennessee “mountain man” and mother of three teenage children. My husband is a respected real estate broker in our area, so his business wasn’t mobile. My Atlanta firm was two and a half hours away. We tried a commuter scenario for a few months and realized that that was in service neither to my firm nor to my new family. And so, from a very practical standpoint, I needed to make a career change—one that was more compatible with my new family situation.

Cm. What year was this?

BH. This was 2012. I considered doing PR for another national firm in Chattanooga, but while I was in the process of rethinking what would be next, the phone started ringing ... and ringing ... and ringing. It surprised me. People started asking me to help them with PR projects—people I’ve worked for in the past and people who just heard I was available—so I started saying yes to some projects. I never wanted to own my own company. I really like collaborating and partnering. But as I started doing projects, I had to—by necessity—open a checking account, of course. But even then, I refused to even name the company. I made them put a generic “public relations” label on the checking account until finally one day God turned on the light switch after about a year and said, “You are now a public relations consultant, and I have brought you some amazing, fruitful work. It’s going to work best if you just trust me, put a name on your firm, and accept that this is a good thing that I want to do in you and through you in this season of

life." It's working very well with me being able to serve good clients and doing important work and balancing work and family life. I can say yes and no to projects—and balance my new role as a wife, mom, and new community member in a new town.

Cm. By what values do you run your business?

BH. Even at a young age, I felt a sense of urgency around maximizing my time and opportunities. Psalm 90:12 has just always made sense to me. "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (NIV). The need to be thoughtful about where to invest my time and steward well any talents I have is even more intense now at age fifty- two. So, I try to make good decisions in first deciding *which* clients I can bring value to and then *what* services I can offer them. I am continually refining my model for which clients and services are the best kingdom use of my experience, expertise, and contacts. My questions look like these: How does it serve the kingdom? What kind of kingdom value does it have? Can I do it with excellence? Can I do it better than anyone else could do it for the client, or do I need to recommend someone who will serve him or her better? At the end of the day, if this person or client is not well served, that lacks integrity on my part, and the kingdom is not well served. The questions go on: Can I do it with excellence in a way that honors my other priorities in life—my husband and my kids? Then who do I need to help me? Who brings skills to this work that I lack? Then I pick the best people I can to build a team—and then I set very, very clear expectations, parameters, deliverables, and price points. And I keep consistent communication and reporting with the client to make sure, at every step along the way, expectations are being met or exceeded and that we're moving the needle in the right direction. This is the bar. I don't always reach it perfectly, of course; and honestly, as a recovering perfectionist, that is the most painful part of owning my own business. My executive coach told me years ago to aim to be an "excellentist" rather than a "perfectionist." That is the best advice I've ever received on that front, and my favorite scripture to help ease perfectionism is, "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24 NIV).

Another key business and life value for me is, how can I honor, lift up, push up everybody on the team with whom I'm working? Art William, founder of A. L. Williams, which today is Primerica, wrote a book in 1984 called *Pushing Up People*. The title intrigued me, and the content so beautifully articulates some principles I saw in my parents' role model and found myself using in my career ... to help my colleagues and employees discover and celebrate their unique gifts and strengths, to take them to the highest level possible. I try to help maximize colleagues' talents not only for the good of the project but also to help them discover or rediscover their own distinctives and advance their careers and networks. I want colleagues and contractors to walk away from work with Bragging Rights Public Relations, feeling like they not only gave but they got. And the same is true with my clients and their internal teams. How can I push them up so that when I walk away and the project is finished, they're better professionally ... better people?

Cm. It sounds like that's your leadership philosophy.

BH. That's number one—lead with a kingdom perspective in mind. Everything has the potential to have positive eternal value, whether you're baking cookies for a living, inventing technology, or helping companies tell their story ... If you do it with excellence, I believe that you lead your testimony with excellence. The first step of having any kind of testimony with anybody in the workplace is to be excellent at what you do. If you're not, there's no testimony. And then one of the things I love most about business—and I hope would be a distinctive of any business in which I'm ever involved—is to help people working with me identify and celebrate their talents. That's what delights me even more than crossing the finish line on a particular project.

### *The Most Powerful Lessons from Her Mentors*

- “Take myself seriously. A good friend of mine calls it ‘championing your own life.’ When I discuss issues, particularly with my older mentors, they often reframe them for me with language and perspective that enables me to take myself more seriously and more credibly than I might otherwise. We tend to be least generous with ourselves, don’t we?”
- Have a mentor or coach to help restate and edit your goals, initiatives, ambitions, needs, and discontent based on his or her seasoned perspective.  
“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor” (Eccl. 4:9 NIV).
- Embody Proverbs 31’s noble characteristics as a Christian woman in the workplace. “I love what a savvy businesswoman that Proverbs 31 gal was! And ‘I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves,’ per Matthew 10:16” (NIV).

### *The Ways She Learned Leadership*

- Making mistakes. “I always pray that God uses every ounce of the pain and consequences of my mistakes to give me an even greater measure of wisdom in return. A colleague shared a quote with me recently that says, ‘Experience is the toughest teacher because it gives you the test before it gives you the lesson.’”
- Proverbs. She reads a Proverb every day. She says Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are wonderful business books.
- She studied the biblical leadership styles of Moses, Joseph, David, and Daniel.
- “Watching other leaders ... learning from their successes and their mistakes ... Learning from others saves tons of time from me

having to learn it firsthand. I love reading biographies for this reason."

## *Her Management Approach*

- “The Jim Collins theory about just getting the right people on the bus and worrying about which seat best suits their gifts and talents later. Make sure you don’t just hire for the position but hire brilliant, fabulous people who know and use their gifts. I am especially diligent in hiring and collaborating with people who are strong in areas where I am weak. In *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, Marcus Buckingham writes meaningfully about the importance of not trying to make people something they’re not. Identify what people are best at and then customize their work, roles, and jobs as much toward that as possible and get somebody else to do the things those folks (and you) aren’t good at.”

## *Her Personal Management Philosophy*

- Proverbs 11:14 (NIV) says, “For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.”  
“I consult the scriptures first. (I’ve learned so much from the management dilemmas and styles of Moses, Joseph, and David. Imagine being Moses and trying to manage a million Jews in a forty-year tour across the desert.) Then I consult wise advisers and learn from the experiences of other leaders—I love reading biographies for this purpose. I learn the most not when I’m the smartest person in the room but when I’m the dumbest. I intentionally put myself in scenarios where I bring the least to the table. I asked Harry Smith, former *CBS Morning News* anchor, for career advice one day, and he said, ‘Watch, watch, watch. Read, read, read. Listen, listen, listen.’ I would add to that ‘Learn, learn, learn by trial and error.’ Be grateful to God when you get it right and forgive yourself when you get it wrong ... He certainly does.”

## *Who Most Influenced Her Leadership?*

- "My parents, Ken and Sue Bragg; my mentors, Jim Webb and Ann Platz, businesswoman, speaker, author; my husband, Todd, a servant-leader of our home and of his amazing real estate company; executive coach Caroline Mendez; and my friend Suzanne Schuman White, COO of her beautiful household, who has always been wise beyond her years. I am a mentor because my parents and others have so generously mentored me and so many others. Because of the skills I learned from all of them, I'm mentoring very aggressively in my life. A privilege."
- Author Jim Collins and his books, *Good to Great*, *Built to Last*, and others
- The book *Now Discover Your Strengths* by Marcus Buckingham
- Leadership books by Andy Stanley, including *Choosing to Cheat*
- Dozens of biographies of leaders from Churchill to Rockefeller, from Barbara Walters to the Wright Brothers, and from Coach Tom Landry to CBS founder William Paley

## *Faith-at-Work Practices*

- "I don't 'integrate' prayer into what I do—I start with prayer, cover it in prayer, and follow it up with prayer. Prayer *is* the work. John 15:5 (NIV) says it all: 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.' Yup, I've tried it both ways. It always works best with God in the lead. So the prayer comes in, asking for the right kind of work. The prayer comes when the inquiry comes about the work. The prayer comes when I'm deciding whether to take the work. The prayer comes: 'Okay, Lord, I've taken the work; what's the best direction to lead this work?' The prayer comes: 'Lord, give me some new creative strategies for this work.' The prayer comes: 'Now I've got to present this strategy; help me to speak clearly and do it well.' The prayer comes: 'Help me build the right

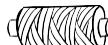
team.' The prayer comes: 'Lord, I've done everything I can; now you're going to have to bring the result.'"

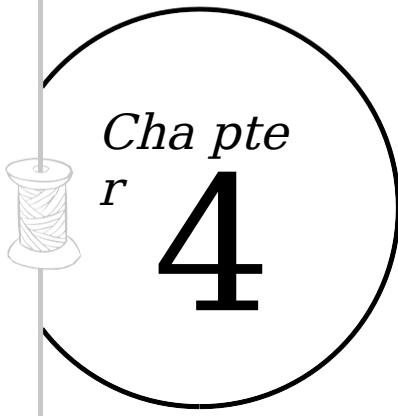
### *What She Wants Other Christian Businesswomen to Know*

- "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom' (Ps. 90:12 NIV) is a verse most don't latch onto until middle age. But if you can grasp in your teens or twenties that life is short, wow, what intelligence that can add to your decision making in your life and career. Realizing God has uniquely gifted each of us, that we have a limited number of days to use those gifts and to pray for the wisdom to maximize each of those days, is powerful.  
"My friend Sharon H. and I started a group called Next 20, and we convene with eight of our sharp friends once a year to serve as each other's personal 'board of directors' to help discern how to maximize our current and future seasons of life. Opportunities to serve often exist in only a particular season of life ... We don't want to miss that window."
- "Be unapologetic about the skills you're really good at. Don't have false humility about them; have a right humility about them and realize God uniquely gifted you in that area for a reason. Remember how angry the master in the parable of the talents became toward the servant who buried his talent to play it safe. God praised the servant who maximized and multiplied his talent. Matthew 25:23 (NIV) says, 'His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"'"
- "Nobody starts out great, even in an area of giftedness. Get all the training and credentialing you can, ask for an honest critique, request help, seek feedback, and be willing to fail as a step toward success."

## *What She Would Like to Have Known at the Beginning of Her Career*

- “No one is good at everything, and well roundedness can be overrated. I spent too much time trying to shore up my areas of weakness rather than feeding my areas of strength that can lead you to being the best of the best.”
- “I wish I had been more comfortable with failing and more aware that great leaders always have lots of failures in their past. This is the whole ‘Babe Ruth struck out more times than he hit’ and ‘Abe Lincoln lost more elections than he won’ principle.”
- “Know yourself. Go through personality testing and spiritual gifts testing, and ask those who know you well enough to tell you the truth. Once you know your strengths, pour more and more energy and development into these strengths. Start off from an area you are gifted in and then seek out the best and brightest in those areas and unabashedly ask them for mentoring help. Study their work and ask them to critique your work.”





**Principal owner:** Janet Ward

**Black Organization:** Ward Black

**Law Industry:** Legal (personal injury

law) **Year established:** 2005

**Organization size:** Thirty-six-person firm (2017)

**Their mission:** We represent “David” in David versus Goliath. We represent the average person against the great, big insurance company.

### *Th e S t o r y*

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Janet is a lifelong North Carolina resident. She grew up in the mill town of Kannapolis, North Carolina, and now lives in Greensboro, which is about an hour and a half north of Kannapolis. She went to Davidson College, which had only just started to take women students when she enrolled there, and planned to major in chemistry (she wanted to be a doctor since the age of four) because she had a scholarship, but that isn’t what happened. She was questioning her chemistry choice when her father added his two cents. “My dad always said, ‘I want you to have a job where you never have to ask anybody for

a job.' So I knew

doctors didn't have to ask anybody for a job, but then I was changing. I thought, *Okay, who else doesn't have to ask anybody for a job? Oh, lawyers! Be a lawyer.* And it was with that level of intellectual rigor that I made the decision to go to law school. God knew what he was doing. I just had no clue at all."

Janet graduated in 1982, went to law school at Duke in Durham, North Carolina, graduated from there in 1985, and had a hard time finding a job. She ended up going to a tiny trial law firm in Charlotte, North Carolina, doing what she thought she was supposed to do. She hated it.

JWB. I did not take trial advocacy at all in law school because I was afraid of public speaking. The height of irony is, now I'm a public speaker. I heard that there was an assistant district attorney job in Rowan and Cabarrus counties, which were my home counties. I went and groveled to the elected DA for the job, in spite of the fact that I had no trial advocacy experience, but he hired me as his first "girl lawyer." I stayed there for three and a half years until 1988. One of my adversaries from the DA's office hired me, a woman who did criminal defense work in asbestos litigation. I joined that all-woman firm, stayed there for three and a half years, and then moved to Greensboro.

Cm. Tell us about how you came to be in leadership and lead your own law firm.

JWB. I guess I never intended to lead anything. By nature—let's exclude my foray as Miss North Carolina in 1980—I don't like to be in head- to-head competition. But from the time I was small, I would be chosen to be in leadership positions, not that I ran for them, but I was chosen for them, from student council in the sixth grade to president of the National Honor Society in high school.

Never having any intention of running my own business, I ended up in a firm in Greensboro in about 1992, where there were male partners, and eventually I bought into ownership in the firm. Some of the partners left, so I ended up with fifty-fifty partner, and then he

and I had a grand split in 2005.

So I ended up having twenty people who worked for me and all these cases that had to be managed, and I had to just figure it out. And that was the time when I had joined a Christian CEO roundtable, and it was God's timing, because he knew I needed business leaders who were tuned in to how to run businesses. I knew how to practice law okay, but I had no idea what to do from a business standpoint.

And I thought between the firm splitting up and my CFO leaving that I was in the ocean without a life raft, much less a boat. So I kind of, by default, became the owner of the firm.

And then after the firm broke up, very shortly thereafter, I had a visit from one of the past presidents of the North Carolina Bar Association, which is our largest statewide group of lawyers with sixteen thousand members. And unbeknown to me, the past presidents had chosen me to be the incoming president elect. So shortly after the firm had this catastrophic split, I learned I was going to become the president elect of the North Carolina Bar Association, which positioned me in a way for my firm's name and for me to be made known in a way I couldn't have asked for in my wildest imagination. So what I believe to be true is that the split of the firm was something God wanted me to do. I was miserable with my partner, and he was miserable too.

Cm. And you said that there was a significant shift financially two years ago. Would you explain that and talk about what the net result of that was?

JWB. Every now and then, I feel like God gives me a few words that are clearly not something I could or would come up with. I was driving to the office one day on Wendover Avenue when I heard in my head, *I am a substitutionary God*. And I thought, *Well, I have no idea what that means, but I will contemplate it.*

I tried to look for what I had knowledge about where I could be a substitution for the people in my life. And what I think God showed me was that in my law firm, I had employees who didn't tithe, but if we

tithed on the gross of the law firm, then we would, in fact, substitute the firm's income for the tithe of those under our roof.

Now, understand that at the time, in the first three years of the firm, I had lost money. Then in the next ensuing five years, we never made more than 1 percent profit. So when I came to the office and announced to my CFO that I wanted us to tithe 10 percent on the gross revenue of the firm, she, being an engineer who is Lean and Six Sigma certified, looked at me like I had lost my mind. Then, like a good colonel, she said, "Yes, ma'am."

And then we established a tithing committee and started the discussion of what this would look like. We tried to use the same business acumen we apply in our firm for our philanthropy. The committee would always be unanimous on our decisions to make an investment in a nonprofit and then make sure we weren't somehow using this as marketing—that our donations to nonprofits would always be anonymous. We wanted God to get the glory, not the law firm.

Our process became very systematic that in all our philanthropy, to encourage the nonprofits to use what we were doing in a matched format to at least allow a doubling of the contribution. And so that exponentially increased what our bit of money was able to do.

After the first year, we felt not only that God did bless us so that we could tithe 10 percent of our gross, in spite of a history of 1 percent profit; we made the biggest profit we'd ever made, and we made almost another 10 percent on top of that. We were also able to give the largest bonuses to staff we'd ever given, and we wanted to do that to be able to say to the team, "Look, we gave away 10 percent of what the firm made, but not only did it not cost you anything, but in fact, you came out better than before we tithed."

At the end of 2014, my bookkeeper of eighteen years came to our CFO, Rhonda, and said she would like to join the tithe team. And Rhonda said, "Well, why do you want to do that?"

I've been here eighteen years. I write the checks. I knew that it was impossible what we did last year. It was God's miracle, and I want to be a part of it."

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## *Thoughts on Leadership*

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### *The Most Powerful Lessons from Her Mentors*

- She had an extraordinarily successful mentor we will call the "un-mentor." "I had a boss I thought did some things that I wanted to do very differently. So I think I learned an awful lot of what not to do by not having a good mentor but having one that was to the contrary."

### *The Ways She Learned Leadership*

- Her C12 Group Christian CEO roundtable
- The Women Presidents Organization, where she learns best practices
- Leadership conferences

### *Her Management Approach*

- Team focused and team led
- Collaboration versus hierarchy
- Corporate decisions by prayerful consensus

### *Her Personal Management Philosophy*

- It is based on her values: integrity, compassion, listening, responsiveness, and making the complex simple.

## *Who Most Influenced Her Leadership?*

- A previous business partner: "If you, as the captain of the ship, can appear strong and steady no matter how bad the storm, then everybody else is willing to follow that, right? If you have somebody who is leading in such a way that the behavior is appropriate to emulate, then that allows things, even in the face of difficult or potentially impossible circumstances, to still have forward motion."

## *Faith-at-Work Practices*

- Her firm tithes 10 percent of the total gross revenue versus the net income (after expenses).
- There is intentional, consistent prayer time at work with her team. "On the first Tuesday of the month, we have what we call 'His first fruits prayer.' And each member of the tithe team takes an hour, a different hour, and with a couple of other friends, we have about eight solid hours of prayer that occur on that first Tuesday. And we have lists of our staff and issues they have. We have big issues like things around the world that are problematic. We have our vendors. We have our clients listed. We have the nonprofits we support, and then each of us spends an hour alone in one of our conference rooms, focusing on God and those particular intercessions."
- Janet prays at work in a conference room every Monday at nine thirty in the morning for a half hour, which models and sets the tone for the firm and team.
- Her testimony is posted on the Ward Black Law website.
- Christian-based billboard advertising is displayed during the Christmas season.

## *What She Wants Other Christian Businesswomen to Know*

- Listen to God and do what he says, no matter how small or how big. “We are in charge of our obedience and faithfulness; he is in charge of the results.”
- Start with the written word and do that in your business. “If we operate from obedience to the word and remember that we have the greatest friend there who is to help us run these organizations, that serves us the best. We need to get God back in our business, not take him out. The world has said, ‘Take him out.’ And I think that’s completely contrary to how the kingdom of God is going to be advanced.”
- “God is so big. And I think we do not appreciate that bigness inside of us—that God is a God of creativity, that he made whales and giraffes and hippopotami and lion fish and thunder and snow and all these unbelievably creative, fabulous things for our enjoyment. And that if we can realize that that creativity is inside of us, and that power of Jesus Christ is there too.”

## *What She Would Like to Have Known at the Beginning of Her Career*

- To have more confidence. “I think, particularly being a woman, we have a tendency to think that we’re not good enough.”
- To know and have the courage to ask for what you want
- To be what God made you to be. “When I got to college, I looked around at all these other salutatorians and valedictorians. And I thought, *I must just be average*. And I wasn’t, you know? And if I had had somebody say, ‘Just don’t listen to that. You operate in your own strength and don’t get into that comparison mind-set because you will then talk yourself into not being what God can make you.’”
- To operate from the power of God versus your own ability





**Previous president:** Deena Redding

**Organization:** Credo Financial Services, LLC

**Industry:** Financial services

**Year established:** 2004

**Organization size:** Eleven to fifty employees (2016)

**Their mission:** Credo's mission is to consistently exceed our clients' expectations by holding each other accountable to our core values.

1. Honesty. Never compromise your integrity or the integrity of the company. Be completely honest, forthright, and truthful. Even though this can be difficult at times, integrity and honesty should always be held above making a profit.

Leviticus 19:35; Proverbs 10:9; Luke 16:10

2. Respect. Every client, employee, associate, or business partner affiliated with the company will be treated with the highest level of respect and appreciation, regardless of title, position, or personal feelings toward one another.

James 2:8-9; Matthew 7:1-2

3. Generosity. We are in the business of helping people solve problems and to face their challenges. Whenever possible, we should help people or organizations reach their goals whether there is profit at stake.

2 Corinthians 9:6; Romans 12:8; Matthew 7:12

4. Quality. Our services will always be of high quality and will provide a strong value for our clients. We won't send a deliverable to any of our clients without the quality of the work being reviewed, even if it's not apparent to the client that a portion of the work isn't of high quality.

Luke 6:6-49; Mark 4:3-9; Matthew 25:14-30

5. Unselfishness. At all times, everyone should be focused on the mission of the company and its core values. Only the company's success will provide for the individual's benefits.

James 3:16; Psalm 119:36, Romans 2:8

6. Do not fear growth. We are committed to growing the company to touch more peoples' lives and build dreams other companies wouldn't do because they don't share our same mission and core values. We will work to have a positive effect on as many lives as possible while maintaining our core values and financial health.

Isaiah 41:10; Job 39:22; Psalm 3:6; Matthew 28:19; Philippians 4:13

7. Accountability. Our mission and core values mean nothing without accountability. We will hold each other accountable to these core values and humbly ask our clients to do the same.

Leviticus 19:16-18; Proverbs 19:25; Proverbs 27:17

## *Th e S t o r y*

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Deena grew up in Cleveland, Georgia, in the north Georgia mountains, with a population of about nineteen hundred. Everyone went to the same elementary, middle, and high school (there was only one of each in town). It was a very rare and unique situation. She enjoyed it and says she always knew everybody. After high school she attended a local college to obtain a business management associate degree. From there she went to North Georgia College in Dahlonega and got a math education degree with a minor in accounting.

DR. Which wasn't what I set out to do; I actually set out to get a business degree. I was going to get an accounting degree, and I went to do an internship at an accounting firm the summer between my sophomore and junior years. And during that summer, all I did was data entry for the accountant. So I took people's tax return information and entered it into a computer; that was extremely boring. So that was the turning point because I thought, *If this is what people do as an accountant, I do not want to do this for the rest of my life.*

So I went back to my college counselor and said, "Okay, I'm ready to change. I don't want to do this. My passion is numbers, business, finance, and money." So, based on a list of questions, a little machine popped out the answer: "Oh, you like math." So the only option at that college was math education. So the next thing I knew, I was sitting in math education classes. I liked math, but I didn't have a passion to teach, and that was just kind of what happened back then in a small town. So I ended up with a BS in math education in 1993, and I taught one year of high school math. That was a disaster because I was very young, and most of the kids weren't interested in calculus, trig, and geometry. So I didn't like that; I liked math. So that was my one and only year in education.

My first job after teaching was working in collections for a well-known insurance company. Within six months, the supervisor had a terminal illness, and that position opened up. I was very young and interviewed

for the position, thinking, *Well, this is a better-paying job, and so I'll interview for it*, really not expecting to get it ... And I was very shocked that I got the position. So there I was, with no experience, and I was launched at age twenty-five into a management position. So they sent me to school at the company, into the management training program, which was very helpful, especially learning how to be a manager of people. Every single person in my department was older than I was. It was quite challenging. I had a lot of people around me who were already challenging my new role, so that made me think, *I'm going to show them that I'm going to do this.*

I was a supervisor to start, and then I excelled through the ranks and began to build my leadership skills, because of the innate drive within me to learn how to figure this leadership thing out. I began to pray, "Lord, if this is what you want me to do, I want to excel." I began to feed myself books upon books upon books, researching Christian leaders—and back then there certainly were no Christian leaders or any kind of books back then about women Christian leaders—but I fell in love with John Maxwell and read everything he wrote.

Cm. When do you think you realized that you were a leader versus just a manager of people? Was there a particular event that stretched your leadership?

Dr. Yes, in 1994, I went through a horrible divorce at the same time I was new to management, and my world fell out from under me. But I think for me, it was sink or swim. It was a time in my life when God really became real in my life, and I remember calling out to Christ and saying, "God, you're either real, or you're not, and you're either going to be God, or you're not going to be God, but I need you to be God in my life." And he was all I had. I mean, I have a great family; I'm not discounting that. But this was a time when I had to be the sole provider for my children. I had to put my big-girl panties on and decide whether I was going to depend on someone else or on God because I didn't have the ability within myself to make this happen.

And so when that happened in my personal life, it showed me that God was in control of my career as well. But again, advancement wasn't happening in women's careers, and everyone continued to say women weren't going to excel. Every job that I went for, especially up against a man, the response was always, "You're never going to beat out a man." And I knew as a woman I couldn't, but if this was God's will, I could. So I just always said, "If this is the Lord's will, it will happen; and if not, then it's not the Lord's will. Then that's okay." But I knew that for my children and for me he was real. He hadn't allowed this to happen in my personal life just for me or just to prove it to me but so I could help others when they went through a trial like this.

Cm. What was a scenario that stretched your leadership skills or taught you something significant in leadership you want to share?

Dr. In 2008, I worked for an electronics manufacturer as their controller and then president. It was a six-figure business when I came on, and within four years, we sold it for ten times that much. After it was sold, I stayed on as president and CEO, and we were growing and growing. During that growth, we focused on hiring great leaders and brought on a CFO, COO, and CTO. The CTO was a very difficult position to fill, because this was a technology company. After interviewing over many months, one of the executive management team suggested that we interview his brother-in-law.

Everyone agreed that he was a strong candidate, but I had a lot of apprehension at hiring a higher up's brother-in-law because I knew it was going to create some conflict. But we did hire him. And that started the downward spiral toward a huge disaster. I went to my CEO multiple times and to other board members multiple times in writing to try to voice this problem. I even went to the board of ethics to try to voice this problem and wasn't heard. It became a war between me and the CTO and my boss. This went on for over six months to the point that it became evident that one of us was going to have to go. And it was going to cost me my job. This was mainly due to the importance of this position in the advancement of the growth of the company. This

was a technology company, and we had to be cutting edge. This role was critical for the company to be successful

But I prayed about it and knew I wasn't going to be successful. So I prayed more about it, and I laid it down and said, "If I can't do my job, if you're not going to allow me to do my job, then I'm going to resign." And so I did because there were no other options available.

So I resigned; the situation was very painful for me. It was very humiliating because I walked away from a job I felt very successful in and very passionate about. But I knew that right was right and wrong was wrong, and I knew that if I wasn't allowed to do the job I was supposed to do, it was the right thing to do. And sometimes when you talk about integrity and about the right things to do, but then you have to actually do them—you know, you have to walk the plank. And I knew God would take care of me, and he did, and he has, and he will. It was one of the most stressful times in my life. I'd never been more physically and emotionally spent. But it was also wonderful; it was one of the best experiences of my life because it has taught me that, again, God will fight your battles for you. Our lives are a journey, and we don't always know where God will take us, but if we trust in him, the journey will be for his glory.

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### *Thoughts on Leadership*

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#### *The Most Powerful Lessons from Her Mentors*

- Don't panic—there's always going to be conflict. "There are always going to be problems that come your way, but whatever happens, don't panic. Relax, take a deep breath.
- Don't make decisions based on emotions. Address the situation in a couple of days after you've calmed down.

## *The Ways She Learned Leadership*

- Experience. "The very best teacher for me was experience and just knowing that my drive taught me more than any book ever taught me."
- Every John Maxwell book ever written
- Management training courses
- A male mentor, a businessman in management who attended her church

## *Her Management Approach*

- Be as flexible as possible but hold people accountable. "They have to be held accountable. I think one of the worst things as a leader you can do is to let an employee get away with something that goes against what you hold to be important. A lot of leaders think they're being flexible, but if you let one employee get away with something and then other employees see that, they think, *But I thought that was a rule, so I guess it's not.*"
- Surround yourself with other good leaders and put good leaders within your organization. "Not necessarily just within your organization—but also around yourself to teach you."

## *Her Personal Management Philosophy*

- Lead like you would your own children. "I always tell my people, 'I treat you like I would my own children,' and I try to be a mother to my business people like I do my own kids. And that style is just to be compassionate and fair but hold them accountable."
- "Definitely to build and sow into the employees and then focus on growth within the business. I think you have to focus on the people, and then you have to focus on the business."
- "More than anything, it's about integrity. I think it's easy to be a good person when everything's going right, but I

always

teach my children—you can ask any of the three of them what the definition of integrity is, and they'll always tell you it's the thing you'll do when no one's looking."

### *Who Most Influenced Her Leadership?*

- Author John Maxwell; she subscribes to his daily e-mails.
- Author Beth Moore

### *Faith-at-Work Practices*

- She prays before meals with staff and before meetings. Deena will preface it with, "If there's anyone here that's offended by this, let me know, and we can address that, but as a leader here, I'd like to pray over my lunch, or I'd like to pray for this meeting."
- She holds weekly Bible study in the office, open to all employees.

### *What She Wants Other Christian Businesswomen to Know*

- "Christian businesswomen should know that it's okay to put your family first. It's okay. And it's okay to think of careers that way because there are a lot of other women out there who did that. I always put my kids first. My kids never suffered because I had a career. But do put your family first and don't think you're sacrificing your career because God will open the doors at the right time when your children are gone. Don't feel like, *My résumé is going to suffer if I do that*, because God will figure that out."
- "God is really your provider, and if he is, then he's going to open the right door for you, and you have to just have that blind faith and depend on him to provide—not just money but the opportunity you need. No matter what job you're in, even if it looks like entry level, do the very best job you can in that position because I never, ever had the expectation that

I was going to be president. I mean, I didn't climb a ladder; I catapulted from the bottom all the way to the top within six months, and that was unheard of. So you never know how the Lord's going to grow you."

- "When you have a gut feeling, you know what the Lord's telling you to do. Don't let someone else convince you otherwise ... just because you think he or she is smarter or has a bigger title behind his or her name. Go with what you feel."

### *What She Would Like to Have Known at the Beginning of Her Career*

"I would probably like to have known that women can be just as good a leader as a man can. I remember thinking a lot of times, *Well, I'm probably not going to get this, but I'm going to apply anyway.* And again, in my day and age, women were never expected to get those opportunities. I would like to have known that I had just as good—and actually better—chance because I always say women are multitaskers, and men aren't."





**Former president and CEO:** Cheryl DeLuca-Johnson

**Organization:** Street Grace

**Industry:** Nonprofit

**Year established:** 2008

**Organization size:** Six to ten staff members (2017)

**Their mission:** Street Grace mobilizes community resources—financial, human, and material—to help individuals and organizations effectively fight domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) through awareness, empowerment, and engagement. Street Grace is working to end DMST in Metro Atlanta through research-based solutions, with a vision of ending it throughout the United States.

### *Th e S t o r y*

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Cheryl was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and was raised with her two brothers and sister in Georgia. She considers herself “southern.” She says her parents were strict but not limiting. Her parents taught her that if you worked hard, you could do anything. Her mother, who is one of nine children, is the smartest person she knows. During

her

mother's era, the choices were marriage and family or an education. They let her know there would be no money for college, so if she wanted to go, it was up to her.

CJ. I went to college originally as a math and premed major. I took a psychology course and loved it, so I changed my major and decided to be a therapist. Since I was working three jobs at the time, I had to switch to the night program. In my junior year, I met my husband, Ernie, through six inches of bulletproof glass (a drive-through window at a bank). It's true. And he says it's the only way to appropriately meet me for the first time. We dated for about six months, and eventually I agreed to marry him in 1982, which was the best decision of my life. We moved to Atlanta, and the college night program I was enrolled in was canceled with only two classes left to go, so I was unable to graduate.

After we had our second child, I decided I was going to stay home. A few months later, I saw a *20/20* episode on Romanian orphans. Ernie came home from work and asked, "What do you feel like doing?" I'm sure he meant "for dinner," but I answered, "I think we're supposed to go to Romania and adopt one of these children."

So in 1991, I went to Romania. The paper work we filled out said we wanted a girl between six months and three years old with no permanent handicaps. I was there four days, and the first child I saw was this little boy, who was almost three years old and definitely had something wrong, but they had no medical records. I called Ernie and said, "You know all that paper work we filled out saying who we could and couldn't accept? I saw this little boy today, and I know he's everything we said we couldn't do. I just don't know how I'm going to live my life wondering what happens to him." And my sweet husband, from across the Atlantic, said, "Well, I guess you just got to bring him home." On July 6, 1991, I brought Michael home. Upon our return, we found out Michael had eight orphanage-related diseases and one genetic disease: muscular dystrophy. They said he might live to age nineteen, and if he had stayed in Romania, he probably wouldn't make it to age four.

Michael is now twenty-eight years old.

At the time, the experience was devastating. I went through a depression and wondered if I would ever be happy again. I wasn't walking with God at the time because I had given up my faith when I was twelve years old and decided that there was no God. I was a very precocious child. I was smart, and it just didn't make logical sense. I was told during my confirmation that my whole world would change, and that simply wasn't the way it was.

During this depression, I knew I had two decisions—things I can control and things I can't. This was my growing-up moment, understanding that I can handle only the things I can control. I decided that one thing I can control is the kind of parent Michael and my other two children have. They can have a depressed parent who refuses to go to McDonald's because she sees kids running and jumping, or I can be the best mom they could possibly have for the time I have them. And although I mess up daily, that was the decision I made, and it brought me out of that depression.

In 1993, we adopted Carmen from Paraguay, and with four children at home, I realized I couldn't just sit at home, so I taught myself to sew and started a drapery business. During that time, my children started going places and came home, asking, "Well, who is Moses? And who is this and who is that from the Bible?" Around 1997, my husband and I decided our children needed a choice regarding their faith. I had given up my faith, but I'd at least had a choice. We started looking for a church, and while we visited many churches, there was never a place for Michael, so I made a stand that if there wasn't a place for him, there wasn't a place for me either.

I went to a new drapery client's house one day, and the first question this woman asked me was, "Where do you go to church?" I told her I didn't, because there was no church that had a place for my son. She informed me that she was in charge of the special ed classroom at her church, Crossroads, which is now 12Stone Church. We started attending, and about two months in, my husband informed me that he had accepted his faith back. Clearly, he hadn't stopped believing in God; he always

had, but he just hadn't practiced it during the eighteen years we had been married. Ernie told me the pastor was going to start coming to our home once a week for a Bible study, and he wanted me to be a part of it. I just laughed and said no.

Pastor Kevin, whom we now refer to as PK, eventually convinced me to join them, and during that time, I read over thirty books in thirty days. I finally came to the conclusion that it takes more faith *not* to believe than *to* believe.

About three months later, I went to PK and said, "I have volunteered for almost my entire life, and I don't think I can belong to a church that doesn't have an outreach program." Here I was, three months in faith, telling the pastor who brought me to faith that I didn't know whether I could stay in this church if it didn't have an outreach program. But PK graciously said, "So make one." And I agreed. I wrote up a business plan and submitted it to PK with three outreach locations to consider.

While my business plan was under consideration, I decided it was a good time to return to school and follow my dream of becoming a counselor. With my newfound faith in hand, I finished my undergraduate work in psychology and pursued a master's degree in community counseling. I also obtained licensing to become a professional counselor.

At this point it was time to consider the volunteer locations outlined in my business plan and put my degree to work. I ended up doing therapy work with the severely addicted, and it was very fulfilling, and I was doing what I had dreamed of doing since I was twenty years old. If you want to witness miracles, then work at a treatment center. Yes, there is a lot of sadness, but when people turn their lives around from addiction, it truly is a miracle. I thought this was where I would stay.

During this time, I went to Sri Lanka for World Hope International and met Norwood Davis, the CFO of 12Stone Church. He brought me this booklet about this new nonprofit, Street Grace, they were thinking of

starting. As I read it, I gave him some suggestions, and he asked me to

lead it. I said, "Absolutely not." Norwood continued asking me to lead the organization, and I ended up applying for it and got the job.

The turning point was realizing that I had been given this dream at the age of twenty, but it was fulfilled only after coming to faith. It was then that I learned that Christianity is certainly a wonderful gift in my life. It is also an enormous responsibility and obligation. As a matter of fact, I called PK one day and said, "If I'd known Christianity was going to be this hard, I wouldn't have done it."

And he said, "Not everybody does it like you."

After accepting the position at Street Grace in 2008, so many things in my life changed. In 2011, Ernie was asking about dinner again, and I said, "Well, we have two empty bedrooms. You know that a child over the age of eight has a 25 percent chance of being adopted out of foster care. With siblings, that percentage goes down." He asked why I was telling him this since we were both over the age of fifty at the time, and I told him, "Because I can't find a retirement age in the Bible. I haven't found it yet. I was just obligated to tell you." Although Ernie declined at that time, four months later he informed me that he thought God was telling us to do it, so we adopted our two youngest, Ashley and Allison, from the US foster care system.

I was nervous about working for a faith-based institution after having come to faith so late in my life, so I tried to run it. And that quickly fell flat. I finally said, "I'm going to do the very simple thing that God told me to do. I'm going to simply show up and tell the truth. And as the leader of this organization, I'm going to serve everyone who asks within our mission and vision." And that's what we've done, and that's what we continue to do.

Currently, we are partnered with the Georgia state attorney general. The way we forged the relationship was simple—we didn't ask him for anything. We said, "Since your mission is to catch all of the men who are trying to purchase children, what can we do to help you do your job better?" As a result, we had an amazing opportunity this year to speak

to the National Association of Attorneys General, where twenty-nine states were represented.

Similarly, the Georgia governor's office has a task force on human trafficking, so we asked, "How can we serve you?" So we joined the task force. When churches approached us, we asked the same question: "How can we serve you so you have a better understanding of the issue?" So we developed training. Everything we do is to help others reach their mission around this issue because if they do, we'll end domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST). We're simply going to supply the tools to help them do it.

### *Thoughts on Leadership*

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#### *The Most Powerful Lessons from Her Mentors*

- Be clear on *who* leads you.
- Commit to excellence, not perfection. "If I worked for perfection in a corporate atmosphere, meaning I would triple-check our statistics and facts before they're published, then I have at least ten times that obligation doing work for God."
- Humility. "I understand that I am no better and no worse than everyone around me, and I think it draws people in."

#### *The Ways She Learned Leadership*

- Watching and observing good leaders like her mentor, Pastor Kevin Myers. "I realized early on that the title didn't matter. I wanted to work for real leaders, not title leaders."
- "My faith gave me the best platform for leadership because I finally understood whom I was really following."

## *Her Management Approach*

- Be a servant-leader.
- Be bold for what you believe in; do not settle for the status quo.
- Hire great people and let them do their job.

## *Her Personal Management Philosophy*

- God continues to ask me to show up and tell the truth in love.
- She looks at everything she does in her life, career, and home and asks, “Is this really what God wants me to do today?”
- She admits to her staff when she doesn’t know the answer or the next step. “I don’t feel like I have to have all the answers to lead, and if I can say that honestly, then everything moves forward.”

## *Who Most Influenced Her Leadership?*

- Pastor Kevin Myers, 12Stone Church

## *Faith-at-Work Practices*

- “Since it is a faith-based nonprofit, faith and work go hand in hand. It is the reason they do what they do: to serve God and mankind. Publicly, they pray before the audience at each event, which a pastor leads.”
- Here’s a brief tidbit that shows how faith and God run her organization: “It is a never-ending task to raise funds for a nonprofit, and we started this nonprofit in a recession. As we hired people and grew, I felt a tremendous obligation to support our people, who needed their paychecks, and because I believed in the work we were doing. Over the years, we’ve gotten down to one paycheck before, and you know what? We got down on our knees, and I said, ‘If God’s in it, he will support it. If he’s not, then we all need to move on anyway.’ I think that through the power of our faith, we

have never chased money. We have

never gone after grants that were outside our vision and mission just for the money. It was tempting, but we never did it. It was a stretch, because it was very stressful at times, but God always came through.”

### *What She Wants Other Christian Businesswomen to Know*

- Live one integrated life and be one integrated person, not different people. “Don’t wear too many hats. Be consistent and congruent wherever you are.”
- Allow yourself some grace to just be you. “When I try to be somebody else, I am going to fail. So just be yourself—your best self—and move forward.”
- Continue to listen to feedback and criticism, even when they feel like a personal attack. Ask yourself, “Is there something of value here?”

### *What She Would Like to Have Known at the Beginning of Her Career*

“That nothing is permanent. I went twenty years before I went back to school. I had completely given up the idea that I would become a therapist, and yet it happened. I think that’s it. If I had known that, yes, I’m not going to be an astronaut, but doors that are closed at one point may not remain so. That’s an important thing to know.”





**Founder and executive director:** Dr. Lori Salierno-Maldonado

**Organization:** Celebrate Life International Inc.

**Industry:** Nonprofit education

**Year established:** 1996

**Organization size:** Ten to fifteen staff members (2017)

**Their mission:** This is an organization dedicated to transforming at-risk kids into responsible citizens by building in them character-based leadership skills and universal principles.

### *Th e S t o r y*

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Lori was born into a youth pastor's home in Southern California. Her parents, Gerald and Rena, were very young when they married. She is the oldest of three children. She says her upbringing, while not perfect, was charmed, and her parents "well groomed" her and her brothers (a fact that is important to her story and the burden the Lord placed on her heart). She grew up mostly in Vancouver, Washington, while her father pastored for forty years there. Her leadership started very early in life, as you will soon read.

LSM. I realized early on that my mouth could get me what I wanted, whether it was at school, home, or church. Or if I didn't like someone, I could impact him or her with this thing called my mouth and my words. I had this personality that wasn't under the lordship of Christ. And I was very obstinate and strong willed. So the two things my parents gave me were constant love and consistent discipline. I got saved at nine years old, but the first time I realized there was any kind of leadership in my life was when I was in the eighth grade. I would go to the church youth group, and the youth pastor was very boring to me. And I would tell him in the group, "You are the most sorry excuse for a youth pastor," and here I was, the pastor's daughter. And so the youth pastors would quit because of me. And I knew it, but my dad didn't.

After about five or six youth pastors quit, my dad hired another one. The youth group was probably about twenty-five strong, and he walked in and put up a plan on the board for us to reach our schools and our community. All the kids were looking at me. I said to the new youth pastor, "That's not going to happen."

And he said, "Excuse me?"

I said, "That's not going to happen. First of all, you need to know that you don't run this youth group. I have run it ever since I was fourteen years old, and I'm still running it. Your plan is not one that we're going to do because it's stupid. And furthermore, I don't know if anyone's ever told you this or not, but you are very ugly. In fact, your hair is out of style. So, the sooner you leave, the better we'll be. And you see these twenty-five people? It used to be four or five. This is my work here." I thought a group of twenty-five people was so huge, so I said, "So you can just roll up your plans, and the sooner you leave, the better, just like all the other youth pastors. Right, kids?"

They all said, "Right. She is our leader; you're not."

Well, there were adult counselors there, and Randy looked at the adult counselors, and they said, "It's just the way it is. She's the pastor's daughter. We don't say anything." Because my dad was very

powerful.

So the youth pastor said, "You and I are going to go have a talk with your father."

I said, "My dad is the one who helped me be a good leader." He said, "Well, good. Let's talk to him about your leadership."

This was the first time in seventeen years anyone challenged me at that church. So he took me into the sanctuary, where my dad was teaching the word of God to about one hundred people. He walked me down the center aisle and whispered in my dad's ear, and my heart was pounding. I was sweating. I have never in my life had a moment like this.

And my dad looked at my mom and said, "Rena, we have some business that we need to do with Lori. Would you please continue the study?"

So we went out into the foyer of our huge church, and the youth pastor said, "We have a problem. Is it true that you've hired me?"

Pastor Marvel: "Well yes, we just hired you last week. This is your first Wednesday. How's it going?"

The pastor replied, "Well, it was going pretty well until your daughter told me that she is the one who leads this group and that she is the one who determines who the youth pastor is and that she would like me to roll up my plans and leave because the sooner I do that, the better it will be for her, the group, and for me. And if I don't do that, she will create a Hades that I've never experienced before. So I want to know, Pastor, do you share this sentiment?"

My dad looked at me, and he said, "Lori Ellen Marvel, tell me you did not say all those things. Pastor, you go back with the kids. I will take care of this."

He grabbed my arm and he said, "Listen, young lady, I need you to be supportive. You're going to sit in this Bible study for the next six Wednesdays and sit in the front row and learn." And so for six weeks,

I didn't go to the youth group, and the youth pastor established his leadership.

After that my dad took me back to the youth group, and he said, "Lori has something she'd like to say to you all. Lori ..."

I said, "I'm sorry for controlling the group since I was in seventh grade, and I'm going to be supportive of the youth pastor and his vision for the youth group." Everyone was astonished.

After youth group, as all the kids were leaving, Randy said, "Lori, I need to talk to you. Of all the kids and counselors in this group, guess who has the strongest capacity for leadership?"

I said, "You."

He said, "No. beyond

me." I said, "Who?"

He said, "You. So here's what I want to do. I want to harness that leadership, and I want to take you and help you see things and do things so that someday in life, you will have done more in your life than I could ever hope for in mine. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

And I said, "Yeah, I think. I don't know, really."

He said, "For instance, when you get up and talk, whether I agree with the content or not, the entire place is spellbound and stops. Nobody breathes; nobody looks to the left or to the right. Do you know what that is?"

I said, "What?"

He said, "It's a gift. And you will speak to more people in your lifetime than I will ever see in my lifetime. Now here's what I want to ask you: are you or are you not up for becoming the best leader God would

ever

have you to be? I'm submitting a challenge. And if you are, I need you to have a submissive spirit, a tender heart toward God, and you don't have to agree with me all the time, but you do have to have a teachable spirit."

I said, "You're on."

I went home, and my dad said, "Well? How did it

go?" I said, "Dad, I love that guy! He's awesome!"

And my mom and dad were like, "We've got one psychotic woman on our hands."

Well, that's when it started for me. So then I got on a fast track—I told Dad, "I want to go to every one of your administrative meetings." I started taking college classes when I was in high school, and Randy made me his intern for two years.

I knew without a doubt, during my junior year at seventeen years old, that I was called to full-time ministry. I said, "Dad, I want to just take this world by storm for Jesus."

He said, "You know what? I have a sense, the same sense that the youth pastor has, about your gift of communication, even though it's very hurtful at times. I'm going to teach you how to speak, how to speak without notes, and how to memorize scripture."

One Sunday, without anyone else in the church knowing, not even my mom, Dad gave me the opportunity to preach in front of the whole congregation. Well, that Sunday came, and I was sitting down with my mom, and she said, "I don't know who Dad got to speak today."

It was me, nineteen years old, on this huge stage with one little mic. I was using a preaching system in which you have pictures associated with each point to make. So my pictures behind what I was saying were working until halfway through, and the picture

went away. My mind

went blank. And was all being recorded. This little nineteen-year-old voice said, "God, my picture went away. I'm just going to stay here and say nothing until you bring my picture back." Well, no one out there knew what I was talking about. So I was standing there, and on the recording there's this silence. The Holy Spirit brought the picture back, and I finished the sermon.

Afterward, I ran to my dad's study, opened his door, fell on his couch, and just bawled my eyes out. So my mom came in, and she said, "Lori, what in the world? You're so dramatic! Can you just calm yourself?"

"I forgot my stupid picture!"

And Mom said, "Lori, nobody knows what you're talking about. Nobody cares. Get out there and greet the people of God. It's not about you, Lori. And whatever they say, you just say two words —thank you."

At the very end of the line of people was an eighty-five-year-old woman, bent over, with a shawl and little half-glasses. She came up to me and said, "Look me in the eye. Now listen and don't forget what I have to say to you. You have been gifted by our Lord Jesus Christ to take his word and speak it from your mouth to people. And he has so anointed it that if you'll be faithful with that gift, his kingdom will be greatly increased. You, my little one, have been gifted with a prophetic utterance in the name of Jesus." And she put her hand on my head, and she said, "Lord Jesus, may this feisty personality come under your lordship, and may she never use that mouth for anything other than the utterance of God's word."

Afterward, my dad came back from his trip and said, "Let's listen to this tape together."

And I just put my head down and thought, *He's going to be so ashamed of me.* Well, when it happened—"Dear Jesus, I lost my picture. Can you bring it back?"—I just kept my head in my hands. And when the whole thing was over, I looked at my dad, and he had

tears coming down his face. And I said, "Dad, I know I disappointed you greatly."

He said, "No. If more preachers would shut up when the Spirit's not talking to them, the greater the kingdom would be. You've taught me a lesson. If you're not hearing from the Lord, shut your mouth. Lori, don't ever lose that." He affirmed me rather than embarrassing me.

After that experience, I finished college and knew I was going into full-time ministry.

I got a biblical studies degree from Seattle Pacific University and got married at twenty-one. We moved to Seattle, where my husband was a youth pastor at the time. And then we moved to Indiana, where we were both on staff at a church there. We had a singles group of eight that started out, and then it grew to two-hundred fifty college-age singles, and it was a powerful ministry. During that time, one of the things I wanted for them was to have a heart for missions and gain a biblical worldview. I had been reading biographies of those who did anything significant for God because I wanted to learn from them.

At the same time, I was at seminary, getting my master of divinity degree. Well, after reading all these biographies, I realized there weren't any women. All those George Muellers and John Wesleys, and where were the women? So I started looking for women who had done significant things, and one of them was Mother Teresa. So I read up on her, and man, she intrigued me because she was just a simple, little woman, but she was so highly powerful.

I studied her for two years. I could tell you exactly how she would think, act, or talk. So I started praying for her, and the Lord said, "You're going to meet her. She's still alive." So in 1988 I wrote her a letter and said, "Mother Teresa, this is who I am. Can I come and bring some college-aged people with me?"

She wrote me back a letter that I have framed in my office, and she said, "You're more than welcome to come." So we made a thirty-five- hour trip from Indianapolis, Indiana, to Calcutta, India,

and worked in her home for two weeks—the home for the dying, the home for the orphans, and the home for leprosy patients. That experience rocked my

world. It rocked my world not only because of ministry but also because a *woman* had done this.

And so she was in Armenia at the time I was there, and so on the way home, I said to the Lord, "If you could just honor one request, and that is for me to meet this woman." I had her handwritten letter. And so on the way home, I saw two sisters in the airport in blue-and-white saris, which signified Mother Teresa's order. And I thought, *She's coming in.* So I asked the gun guard if I could get past his barricade, and he did because of the letter I showed him. The door opened up, and there walked in Mother Teresa, all four foot eleven of her. As I approached her, I was super enthusiastic.

I kissed her and told her she was my role model, and she told me, "Calm down. I am not Jesus. I am simply a woman. I am a pencil in the hand of God." And then she asked me about myself, and she said, "What would you have me do for you?"

And I said, "I'd like you to meet these students."

And then she looked at me and said, "Are you the leader of this group? Did you work in my homes?"

I said, "Yes."

"Did you see what you came to find?"

And I said, "Well, my one question is, what makes you influential?"

She said, "Very simple answer. I love God, and I love people. Here's what I would tell you. You go back to your country, and you find the darkest spot that you can find, the darkest one, and then you, with Jesus, just shine that little light. Don't worry about being successful. Don't worry about being big. Don't worry about being popular or about being rich or famous. And if he wants you wealthy, if he wants you successful, if he wants you famous, he will do that."

I didn't think I could be Mother Teresa, but I could relate to her personality. And then one time she said to me, "I am an old lady. You are a very excitable lady. I don't like that, but this is what I say. I someday will die, and you will still be here. Do you understand this?"

I said, "Yes, I understand it."

She said, "When I die, you go on. You go on beyond me."

And when she died, the first time I heard Mother Teresa had passed away, I felt this mantel fall on my shoulders, and I thought, *I might not go serve the leper patients, and I may not go serve the orphans, but I am going to go to the darkest spot*, and that's what happened.

In 1995, I got invited to speak at an inner-city school in Florida with three thousand kids. When I got up to speak, before I said my first word, they cursed at me and shouted foul names. They gave me the finger; the guys told me what they wanted to do to me after the assembly, and it freaked me out. And I don't know what I said, but for forty-five minutes I spoke to those kids, and it was horrific. I had gang members coming toward me; the principal did nothing. God got me through it. When I was over, I went into the bathroom, knelt by a toilet, and said, "Dear Jesus, if you don't ever want me to do that again, I wouldn't mind."

And he said, "For such a time as this, this is why you exist. Do you remember what Mother Teresa said to you? Go to the darkest spot. You just found it. These kids will never darken the door of a church, and the church is not here. I need you to build a bridge." And it was there that the call came to build a bridge to go to the kids in inner-city schools.

Celebrate Life International was established as a nonprofit in 1997. And now, eighteen years later, we have reached thirty-three thousand kids in seven different countries, and we're about to start our first capital campaign to reach another thirty-three thousand kids within four

years and to get into twenty-five new locations and countries.

Cm. Was there any other event that stretched you as a leader?

LSm. Yes, five years ago, the man I had been married to, and for whom I basically adored the ground he walked on, said to me "I'm issuing you a divorce." It was like a brick or book hit me, blindsiding me.

That news challenged my leadership because I wanted to give up. I didn't want to help kids anymore. I told the Lord, "I have been serving you from a very young age until now, and you know what? I'm done. I'm done." And that was when I was fifty. I went through a severe depression. I took a ninety-three-day sabbatical the board gave me, and I chose to do it in solitude in the desert, and I memorized three books of the Bible during that time, and I sought God's voice. And what I learned from that was, in my own leadership style, I had tasted early success, and I'd had consistent success. This felt like my first big, huge failure. And did I have the resilience? Did I have the right perspective? And I would say, no, I did not. I wanted to quit, I wanted to give up, and I wanted to extinguish my life.

I realized then that my leadership wasn't as strong as I had thought because strength is shown in difficult situations. So during that sabbatical, the Lord said, "What are you going to choose? Resilience, proper perspective, and perseverance? Or are you seriously going to just go somewhere and work in a discount store?" Not that there's anything wrong with working in a discount store, but that's not what God had called me to do.

And so what I chose in that moment was to go to counseling. I thought, *I need help because I am very, very weak.* So I chose resilience, I chose perseverance, I chose perspective. And that's why I memorized three books of the Bible, because I was believing lies, and I had to reverse the lies about my marriage: *If you wouldn't have done ministry, if you would have cooked better, if you had looked prettier, he would have stayed.*

So, looking back five years later, I am a different leader today because of that experience. I have learned not to be infatuated by flashy success, but I'm not afraid of it either. As Mother Teresa said, "God has not

called me to be successful. He called me to be faithful." And so my whole

definition of value, success, ministry, and leadership was defined five years ago. It redefined me in a stronger, deeper, more mature way. I wouldn't want anyone to go through it, but as a result of that, I love who I have become.

## *Thoughts on Leadership*

### *The Most Powerful Lessons from Her Mentors*

- Your personality must stay under God's leadership and authority.
- The mouth is a powerful tool; it can hurt, or it can raise people up.
- Mother Teresa told me, "You Americans love your notebooks. You fill them up and take your notes and put them on the shelf. Just pray and obey."

### *The Ways She Learned Leadership*

- From her first mentor, Randy Hood, her youth pastor
- From her father, the Reverend Gerald Marvel
- Serving with Mother Teresa and asking her questions
- The book *Ordering Your Private World* by Gordon MacDonald

### *Her Management Approach*

- CLI has six core values: integrity, teamwork, volunteers, prayer, growth, and joy.
- Her personal priorities are celebration, excellence, and depth. A quote by Dr. Lyle Dorsett sums them up perfectly: "If you will focus on the depth of your ministry, God will take care of the breadth of your ministry."

## *Her Personal Management Philosophy*

- “The first thing I question when I meet, read of, or hear someone is, ‘Where is this person in his or her depth? Who is he or she?’ Because what the person does isn’t as important as who he or she is.”
- “I take intentional time with my self-leadership. My relationship with God is part of that self-leadership, but it’s my number one priority. I learned from a previous husband and other leaders in my life who displayed unhealthy self-leadership.”

## *Faith-at-Work Practices*

- Personally, there are five practices she does weekly—prayer, Bible study, scripture memorization, reading, and solitude.
- She established Summit University internally: the staff read books on becoming better leaders, believers, and people. They had monthly discussion groups.
- Weekly, for twenty minutes, they have smaller groups of staff who pray for all the investors, volunteers, and each other.
- Yearly they have a twenty-one-day fast and prayer (all staff, volunteers, and board members).
- They have a yearly, paid, personal four-hour retreat for staff.

## *What She Wants Other Christian Businesswomen to Know*

- Your public life is only as strong as your private world. “Don’t be deceived by the dragon of success because it can eat you alive *if* your private world is not in order. However, if your private world is in order, then enjoy the success; enjoy the fruit. But always know that who you are is more important to God than what you do. Because ultimately, your character, your essence of being, is what he loves.”
- Learn self-leadership. “Self-leadership is imperative, and the hardest people to lead are ourselves. We’d rather lead up,

lead

beside, and lead down, but leading inward is the most difficult thing.”

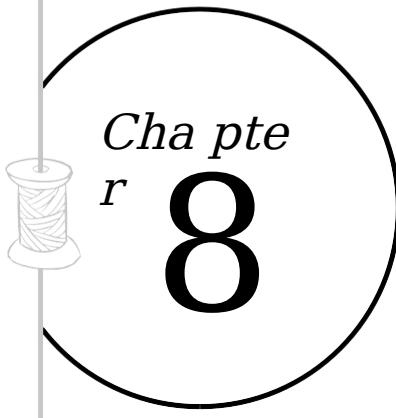
- Give yourself “permission to fly” or get permission to fly from someone you respect and trust.
- Be careful not to sabotage your own success. “Don’t be afraid of big results, budgets, and fruit. Just make sure the priority of them is in the right order.”

### *What She Would Like to Have Known at the Beginning of Her Career*

- That you need good business sense. “Even if you are in ministry (the seminary degree is only half of what you need), learn how to run an organization and get training in business management and business finances.”
- Some advice Mother Teresa gave her. “Truly, truly pray, and what you hear, obey.” Which has everything to do with your relationships, your leadership, and your business.”

It’s not about your happiness, comfort, or wonderfulness. It’s about your faithfulness. Know at the end of the day, with all our scars, all our mistakes, all our sweat and tears, all the stupid things we’ve ever done, and all the good things we ever did, that God will say “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”





**CEO and chief zookeeper:** Cynthia Bertucci Kaye, former founder & CEO, Logical Choice Technologies

**Organization:** Alive Studios

**Industries:** Education, technology

**Year established:** 2014

**Organization size:** One to five staff members (2017)

**Their mission:** Our mission is to equip educators with engaging solutions that help young students become proficient in reading and math by the third grade. Join us.

### *Th e S t o r y*

Cynthia was born in Smithtown, Long Island, New York, the youngest of three. Her mother was a stay-at-home mom, and her Italian father was an entrepreneur with his own successful building business. Her father was fifty, and her mother was forty when she was born (she grew up more as an only child, since her siblings were twelve years older than she was). She says she was a tomboy and big into sports while growing up. She was the first and only female baseball player on her local youth

team. Her father's favorite sayings, in response to anything she wanted to try or do, were "Why not?" and "Let's try it!"

CBK. In high school I wanted to be a communications major and be in the Olympics. I ran track and cross-country—and running cross-country is a bear, but it built up my endurance. I did get a track scholarship to Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville, Florida. I got as far as the tryouts, and I made the nationals. I didn't make it to the finals, but it was good preparation. So then I went to Florida State University and decided to change my major to elementary education. And it's funny; at the time I felt that if I wanted to be a good Christian wife and mom and I wanted to work, I better find something that would lend itself to that, so I chose education (to have the summers off). So I did that and worked toward my degree. Then in 1987, during my internship with a fourth-grade class, the Apple SE came out.

My intern teacher didn't know exactly what to do with it. So I said, "Look, I know what to do with it. Let me have it," and the teacher next door didn't know what to do with it either, so I took that one, and I had two of them, and we started doing all our curriculum using the computer. The kids got so excited; they were so engaged. We would do writing and reading, and after the three or four months were up with my internship, my intern teacher said, "All right, Cynthia, writing went up by 16 percent from your work with them. I think you would be better helping bring technology to schools than just being in the classroom. I think you could help more teachers." And I thought, *You know, that's a good idea. I'm not sure how I'll go about doing that*, but I thought that was going to be my new vision.

So after graduating that year, I moved to Atlanta with a friend to start my new career, and I looked for computer companies that had an education division. I didn't look in the want ads; I just looked up the companies I wanted to work for, and I harassed them. I called them constantly; they would never call me back. So I thought I would just drop in to this one particular company at lunchtime. So I went in the lobby and asked for the guy I knew was hiring; they

said he was at

lunch. I said, "That's okay. I'll sit on the couch and wait for him to come back." So he walked in the door, and I jumped up. I introduced myself and said, "Look, I'd love the opportunity to work here."

And he said, "Oh, all right. Come back tomorrow at two, and we'll do an interview." So I did. And I came back the next day, and he said, "Look, you're so persistent. I'm actually going to create a job for you in AppleCare sales."

I thought, *Fantastic*. My pay was dirt cheap, but I thought it was a foot in the door. And I was on the phones every day, selling AppleCare warranties. About a month later, everybody was getting laid off, but Apple kept me, and the new owner was big into education and gave me an opportunity. He said, "I'll give you one year to sell in education." And that's how I met my husband, Ron, who was a technical engineer at the time.

We sold together as a team, and in my twelfth month, I finally got my first sale from a major county in Georgia. And that's where it all started. So we slowly just started building a department, and it ended up being one of their biggest—other than their government division.

I worked for them for six years, and I learned the business. We got married while we worked there in 1989. You know, when you work together, it's like dog years or something. We thought, *Let's just get married now. We're together all the time anyway*. Well, what happened is, I got married, I got pregnant, and I thought, *All right, I guess I'm supposed to be a stay-at-home mom now*. I had that pressure that that was the right thing to do. So I had our first baby, Christine, and I remember her sitting in her high chair while I was feeding her Cheerios. I don't know what most mothers read, but I was reading *Inc. Magazine*. And I remember reading this story about how this guy took applesauce and clay and started making biodegradable golf tees; he made a million dollars. And I remember staring at Christine, and I said, "Look at this. Why can't we do this?" And she was drooling and spitting Cheerios at me. And I just wasn't content. I mean, I loved being a mom, but I was very driven, and I have to have a cause. I believe you can have a career and be a good mom, too.

While Ron was still working at the computer company, a major electric company bought it out. I said, "Ron, I've got to get back to work." As a matter of fact, the manager at the electric company was saying, "Cynthia, please come back and run the education division," because it was my division basically, and they had inherited it. So they set up an interview, and on the morning of the interview, the guy called me and said, "Cynthia, don't come in. The policy at the company is, we can't have a husband and wife working for the same company. Your husband's already here, so we can't hire you." So I hung up the phone, thinking, *Okay, now what do I do?* So Ron came home, and I said, "Look, honey, I think I want to just start my own business. I'll just do it in the bonus room. I'll have Christine crawling around, and I know what to do."

He said, "Well, let me ask my boss." So he went back to his boss and said, "Look, since you can't hire Cynthia, she wants to start her own education company. Is that okay?"

The guy said, "Oh yeah, she'll be no threat to us whatsoever. Tell her to go ahead."

Ron said, "Okay, honey, go ahead."

Well, they were all my customers, so I called them all, and that's how the business was built.

We started in our bonus room (an extra living room), and then we moved to the basement, and then we just started growing from there. And that's how, in 1994, Logical Choice was born. As of 2010, we grew it to \$97 million and a team of 260 people.

In April 2013, we sold Logical Choice; we had some bumps and bruises going through that, so I didn't know what to do next. I felt purposeless. I'm not used to that. I remember cooking at the stove one night with tears coming down my face, and Ron said, "What's wrong with you?"

I replied, "I feel like I have no purpose. I'm not tackling anything, and

the thing is, I'm not sure what I want to tackle."

At that time, we had Letters Alive, a software program we had created at Logical Choice because my youngest sons were struggling readers. It uses augmented reality 3-D to help children read. I really loved it, but I sold the whole kit and caboodle to this other company. I was kind of burned out about everything, but I approached them to buy it back. And even though my heart was for that, I was done with risk. I didn't want to work for anybody; I was so used to working for myself. But I didn't just want to do a start-up to be starting; I wanted to be passionate about it, you know? And they came back and made me another offer on buying the software, and I was very disinterested. And I asked God, "God, what do you want me to do? Show me because I'm not sure." And I don't want to be jumping in headlong into something I shouldn't, which I'm prone to do.

And God said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going over here."

God said, "No, you're supposed to be over here." We were far apart, and I thought, *I've got to come back to where God wants me.*

So December 2013 and January 2014 went by, and I was thinking, *Oh God, what are we doing? Can you write it on the wall?* He didn't do that, though. But I had this little stirring but not enough. I said, "God, you're going to have to help me do this. If you want me to start this software business, you're going to have to help me because I don't know what to do, and I'm kind of tired."

Well, a business associate and mentor called me one day and said, "Cynthia, I think you should do this software thing, and I'm going to wire twenty-five thousand to start it."

I said "Really? All right." So I opened up a bank account and called it Alive Studios. I needed another \$275,000 to close on the software, and I was having trouble raising it. People don't understand the

education market. I called a previous investor at Logical Choice, and I told him the vision.

He said, "All right, Cynthia." And I got the money that day, right before we needed it. So I thought, *All right, I'm going to keep going.* And we have.

God's way is to provide at the eleventh hour. This stretches our faith; it's developing our trust. And then he said, "Don't worry. Work on this. Don't worry. Just pray. And be thankful." So I really work on that—some days better than others—just to trust God that he's got a plan.

## ***Through TS on Leadership***

### ***The Most Powerful Lessons from Her Mentors***

- "My pastor told me early on that our lives with God are like the crust of the pizza. Most times we think of a slice—church as a slice, my work as a slice, my family's a slice. And that's how we live—with these slices. But our relationship with God is really the crust of our lives. It's not a slice. And I was like, 'Oh, yeah, that's a good visual' because I was treating it as 'God, you get Sunday, and that's it.' It's not a religion, it's not a slice. It's a relationship with the Creator of the universe.' And I started thinking, *If I could really have a relationship with the Creator of the universe, I want that.*"

### ***The Ways She Learned Leadership***

- From the competitive team sports she played
- From her parents, who were a great influence—"My father being an entrepreneur really put no restraints on me while growing up. He felt and made me feel like I could do anything I put my mind to."
- Reading John Maxwell leadership books

### ***Her Management Approach***

- Be authentic and honest.
- Have fun but work hard.

- Treat people how you would like to be treated.
- Every team member adds something. “If somebody has a gift, let’s encourage that, and let’s support it. You know, even with my kids, I try to say, ‘What are you wired for? What are you passionate about? And let’s try to encourage that and make that happen.’”

### *Her Personal Management Philosophy*

- Vision. She casts a God-led vision and then collects the most talented people to join her in going after it. “People want to be a part of something bigger than themselves, and I do too. I think I’m more about ‘Where are we going?’ than ‘What am I doing?’”
- “My leadership role is player or coach. We’re very similar to how a sports team is run, and when you build that, there’s a lot of loyalty, and you look out for each other. And you’ve got a goal, and you’re trying to move the ball down the field. In our weekly meetings, we reflect and think, *We gained some yardage this week, but we lost some yardage too. Not sure if we’re net positive, you know?*
- “I surround myself with people who are smarter than I am in the areas I’m not good at.”

### *Who Most Influenced Her Leadership?*

- Her youth pastors, who were very strong leaders with deep character and very authentic
- Kevin Myers, pastor of 12Stone Church
- Verne Harish and the Gazelles Growth Institute three-year MIT Program and yearly growth summits

### *Faith-at-Work Practices*

- She spends regular time with God. “I do it in the morning first thing. It’s not oodles amount of time, but I just try to connect

and give the day to him and have gratitude and thank him."

- “I don’t pray a lot publicly. I think it’s great for those who do. I might mention to the team, ‘Let’s really pray about such and such,’ or I’ll just be walking and say, ‘We’ll need God’s favor on this, and God, we need your wisdom’ while I’m talking. It’s like I’m walking through it, and I’ll just say, ‘God, I’m about to go into this meeting. Give me favor and wisdom on how to talk through this.’”
- She reads faith-related books, such as *Spiritual Leadership* by Henry and Richard Blackaby.

### *What She Wants Other Christian Businesswomen to Know*

- “I don’t look for people’s approval. I don’t know why. That’s just in my DNA. Not that that’s always good. I do try to look for God’s approval.”
- Communicate! “I know a lot of people don’t like confrontation, and they avoid talking to people, but you’ve got to communicate.”
- Let people see your heart and know that you care. “If you do, they’ll tend to be gracious, listen to you, and try to work something out.”
- Focus on the win-win versus being right.

### *What She Would Like to Have Known at the Beginning of Her Career*

- That it all centers on what your passions, wiring, and giftings are. “Everybody is gifted by God, and it’s unique. And he or she needs to try to tap into that. And it’s not always easy to figure that out. But I would spend a lot of time and energy to figure that out.”
- Surround yourself with people who can mentor you in your growth.





**Owner and biblical counselor:** Sherri Hall

**Organization:** Creative Counseling Solutions for

**Women Industry:** Christian counseling

**Organization size:** One to five staff members (2017)

**Their mission:** To connect the riches of Christ to the realities of life

**Year established:** 2013

### *Th e S T o r y*

Sherri, a self-proclaimed “south Georgia country girl,” was raised in the small town of Jessup. Her parents divorced when she was ten, and they moved into “the city” during her senior year in high school.

Cm. Did you always know what you wanted to do for a career?

SH. Absolutely not. I didn’t know what I wanted to do, but I did have really strong senses at times, when I was in clubs and organizations in high school, that I would be a speaker. I would just have these strange thoughts, see people speaking, and think, *I’m going to do that one day*. And



that's exactly what I have done in the past twenty years or so. I didn't think I would go to college to do that. It wasn't until I was an adult that I felt called into counseling and having my own business.

When I was in my early twenties, I moved to Athens, and it was there that I wound up telling a very trusted mentor and someone I respected that I felt like I would be a counselor one day. It just came out of my mouth. And I never thought another thing about it until years later, after I'd been speaking with women's groups, and I would just have a flood of women wanting to talk with me about what I had shared. And that's when I saw the realization of what had come out of my mouth years ago just before I met my husband. During that time, my mentor asked me, "What is it you see yourself doing in five, ten years from now?"

I immediately said, "I think I would like to be a counselor." And I couldn't believe I said that. But then later I wound up seeing how God was leading me to do that through giving me those opportunities. Every week, it seemed like people were calling me, e-mailing me, and wanting to talk about their lives and what maybe I had been through, how it was similar to theirs.

Cm. Tell us the story about how Creative Counseling Solutions for Women (CCS4W) got started.

SH. I actually have a business background that has been very beneficial in what I'm doing now. I emphasized in accounting, but then later, in 2006 at the age of forty-two as I was working on my goals, I felt led to go to school to be a counselor. So I did and got a certification from CCEF—Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation—and later a seminary master's degree from Trinity Theological Seminary.

It is interesting that I really would never have done what I have recently gone out and done in the past two years. But I was in a situation at a counseling office in which I just didn't feel like I was counseling in the same way they were. I felt like there was a really big difference in the way we counseled (leaning more on the Holy

Spirit's leading in my counseling than I was in psychology), but I respected their way, and after four and a half years of being there, the Lord began to move

me out. There were so many things God was showing me in terms of "It's time—there is a transition coming." I would journal all these things he was putting on my heart from different avenues. And I was hearing all the same message. It was time to move out and overcome that comfort zone I was in and remember that he was with me and to trust him. It was a very fearful time, but I wound up leaving the office I had a thriving practice in not knowing where I was going or what I was doing; just trusting, literally just trusting the Lord every day.

During this time, I would often go to a local restaurant that had just built a courtyard. I rang the doorbell because it wasn't time for them to actually be serving—they only serve in the evening—and asked the owner, Natalia, whether I could use her courtyard for counseling. Because as soon as I left that office in June 2013, people were calling me, finding me, in all kind of ways, at church or wherever, and wanting me to counsel them. Well, I didn't have an office. So the Lord literally showed me after I left that he was putting this together, and it wasn't intentional on my part, but it was very intentional on God's part. Within just a couple of weeks, I had thirty or forty clients, and I have over two hundred now, and it just continues to grow every month.

## *Thoughts on Leadership*

### *The Most Powerful Lessons from Her Mentors*

- Leadership is influence. "If we're not able to impact peoples' lives to influence them, if we are walking and no one's following, or if we think we're a leader and no one's following us, we're probably not doing something right."
- Influence is based on trust. Trust comes from integrity and transparency. "People have to trust us; we have to have integrity. And those things really do come from our walk with the Lord. But if people can truly see we are who we say we are, that there's no double-mindedness, then they can respect us. I believe that helps to influence their lives and maybe follow in

a similar way."

## *The Ways She Learned Leadership*

- Through personal mentors from work and church
- John Maxwell books
- Michael Hyatt publications
- Dr. Lee Warren books

## *Her Management Approach*

- Her top values and priorities are faith and family.
- Be joyful and keep your sense of humor. “I believe joy and levity are essential to just continuing to thrive in every way—spiritually, personally and professionally—in your organization.”
- Have a teachable spirit. “As a team, we look for opportunities to get together, and we’re all learning and growing, and I’m growing with them. I don’t ever see myself as if I’ve arrived.”
- Believe in synergism:  $1 + 1 = 4$ . When two people come together, the result is larger than what either can do alone.

## *Personal Management Philosophy*

- “To humble myself and surrender my life to Christ. Then he literally fills me with his Spirit, which allows me to have all of the qualities I feel like are so essential in leadership.”

## *Who Most Influenced Her Leadership?*

- Dan Dorden, her previous counseling center director
- Dr. Howard Eyrich, director of counseling at Briarwood Presbyterian Church
- Dr. E. C. Sheehan, pastor emeritus at Ingleside Baptist Church in Macon, Georgia. “He was a leader in all things spiritual in my life for years.”

- Her husband, Harry Hall, a project management trainer and speaker

## *Faith-at-Work Practices*

- She prays in weekly staff meetings.
- She encourages each staff member to have a daily quiet time in the morning.
- She prays for each staff member and client.
- She prays for the business and God's will and leading in it.
- Personally, she spends a half day each week in extended prayer time to hear the Lord's guidance in counseling issues for each client.

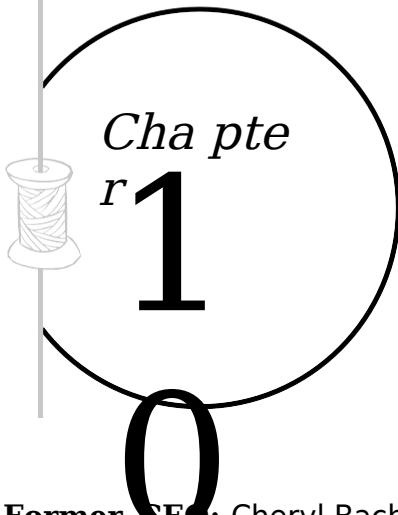
## *What She Wants Other Christian Businesswomen to Know*

- Trust the passion and the vision God's given you; it doesn't age. "Your heart doesn't age, spiritual gifts don't age, and your passion doesn't age. It doesn't matter how old we get as women; we're always going to be influencing and leading others if we realize it's really all about the heart."
- Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

## *What She Would Like to Have Known at the Beginning of Her Career*

- Be very careful with whom you surround yourself. "There are some friends and associations I've had whom I literally had to let go because they didn't serve me and my vision. If they're discouraging and negative, they can really hold us back from all God wants us to be and do."
- Intentionally surround yourself with like-minded people. "I've really been very, very careful about being around those people who are like-minded, who do want to go with God and follow him and who really want to reach their fullest potential."





**Former CEO:** Cheryl Bachelder

**Organization:** Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen,

**Inc. Industry:** Food-service restaurants

**Year established:** Brand 1972, company 1992

**Organization size:** \$268.9 million, 2,600 restaurants (2016)

**Their mission:** To be the world's best quick-service restaurant experience. Being the best means providing outstanding quality, service, cleanliness and value so that they make every customer in every restaurant smile.

### *Th e S T o r y*

Cheryl has been married for thirty-four years to a wonderful Christian man, Chris Bachelder. They have raised three daughters—two natural-born daughters and one they adopted ten years ago. She is the oldest of four children, three daughters and a son, born to Max and Margie. She says her parents are incredible faith-based people who actually made leadership development their life's work. They emphasized educating, engaging in the community and in church, and serving others. Because

of this investment, all four children have become business leaders in industry with faith. Due to her father's work, their family moved every three years. They lived in eleven places by the time she was eighteen, including Asia and Europe. As a result, Cheryl says the frequent relocating forced her to be a high adapter, to like and embrace change.

Cb. When my parents and siblings moved to Asia, it was my senior year of high school. So I had to become an adult immediately and went to Indiana University, into the most rigorous music school in America, second only to Julliard. The competition was fierce, and expectations were high.

I was overwhelmed. I went through music school for a year, spent eight hours a day in a practice room by myself, and said, "I don't think I'm in the right place. I'm sad, I'm lonely, and I'm not very good at this." So I went back home to Hong Kong the summer after my freshman year. And being the decisive person that I am, I wanted to quit music school. I was done. I thought I'd just stay in Hong Kong for a while and figure things out. My dad looked at me and said, "No, we don't quit. I don't know what that word means, but that's not the plan."

This was the summer when I figured out I was really fascinated with what my dad was doing in international business. And he took me with him as he visited factories and went to dinner with other executives, and he just let me watch and ask questions. I did go back to IU (Indiana University) that fall, but I went back to the business school. They have a good international business program, which is what I thought I would do at the time. And I literally changed gears. They had an honors program; I started taking MBA classes right away, which were very challenging. It was after the second semester of my sophomore year, so I was going in a new direction. And it was instantly a fit with who I am. I don't remember a nanosecond of unhappiness with that choice. I felt peace; I'm not big on the "happy" word, but I felt at peace with it from that point forward in 1976.

Cm. So how about your first management job? You started at Proctor & Gamble (P&G). In what role or department did you start there?

Cb. P&G recruited me at Indiana University because I was president of my sorority, and that's how they picked leaders back in those days. They wanted proven leaders. So I didn't request an interview; they requested it. P&G had a whole battery of tests you took—I better understand why now. And they chose me as a leader that would fit well in their "brand management program." Brand management is general management of a product brand. Camay bar soap was one of my brands—it's dead now—but it was an old-fashioned soap. Our little team of three was in charge of everything about making that brand successful. We picked the packaging, the product formulation, the advertising, and the budget investment. We measured market share, and we created sales programs with the sales team. It was a little microcosm of general management at a very young age. I was as green as green could be. I often say I have an MBA, but I got it from P&G, *where I got the experience.*

The first brand I was responsible for managing was Planters nuts, and my first new product launch was Planters Honey-Roasted Peanuts. That was my first time to lead how we would support a brand. And it was a tired brand that needed freshening up. It needed new products. Mr. Peanut needed to come alive and become better. And so I remember most of the reframing of the business proposition. And interestingly, I then became a brand-turnaround expert in my career. What I did in that first job is what I've done during the rest of my career. I've taken brands that were iconic but had fallen off their game. And that is my job today, to figure out how to make the brand fresh, relevant, and distinctive again.

## *Thoughts on Leadership*

### *The Most Powerful Lessons from Her Mentors*

- The power of encouragement. Her mother often told her, "You can do it. You can try that. You can go there. You can travel. You can study."
- How to create a successful work environment (see the "Who Most Influenced Her leadership?" section below). "So working for two very different bosses early in my career, back to back, really caused me to understand how to create an environment for success. The first boss got our best—he got fabulous work out of us, and it took the company to new heights. The second boss who demeaned us was condescending to us and told us we were all stupid as rocks. Each staff member left and went on to run and lead other companies."

### *The Ways She Learned Leadership*

- From the discipline of practice and music theory. "Music theory is math; music practice is an incredible discipline and the expression of music is quite visionary—you're creating something. So in me, you do see a musician. I often talk about music as a word picture for how I lead, because I was prepared by music to be a leader."
- From P&G's management training program. "They invested in teaching me leadership skills—how you run a good meeting, what a good budget looks like, how you work in a team, etc."
- Being the oldest child in her family and the oldest of the cousins. "I first became a leader as the oldest cousin when I was nine years old. We put on a musical production at every family reunion in the summer, and I was in charge of them with my other bossy cousin, Jack. And I remember believing I was a leader at nine, running *The Sound of Music* production, and I told everyone who he or she was going to be in the play and

what he or she needed to do, and I made them get prepared. I coached and then I prepared them to give a great performance, but I always had the lead part and sang the major closing song— the queen, the bossy oldest girl that I was. So I really think I was wired for leadership, and my life position prepared me for leadership. And I don't remember a single day that I didn't think of my role in life as leadership."

### *Her Management Approach*

- Use assessments on all your team members for the best fit. She uses *Clifton StrengthsFinder* and *Standout* by Marcus Buckingham.
- She has a defined company purpose and principles that guide all team members.
- She leads everyone on a personal purpose and principles process to define his or her work vision and values. "We ask everyone to go on a journey to personal purpose and principles. We write those down. We ask him or her to look at three things: his or her life experiences—we do lifelines. Pertaining to work, based on the themes of your life, what have you learned that has created who you are at work and want to be at work?"

### *Personal Management Philosophy*

- Strengths, strengths, strengths. "That's my worldview. Everybody is created with strengths. You can work your whole life on your weaknesses, and they might improve by 15 percent. So work on your strengths and put them to the best use."
- Work from purpose and principles.
- Her work values are legacy, integrity, and growth.

## *Who Most Influenced Her Leadership?*

- Her father, Max Stanton, the most important mentor in her life
- Her bosses, the best and *the rest*. “I had a boss who was an encourager-leader. The first thing he said to me was ‘I chose you for this role because I love what you bring to it. You’re innovative, you’re creative, and you’re bold.’ Nobody had ever told me he or she loved that. And then every week he told me how excited he was about what I was doing. And boy, I was like, *This is new. I never experienced this before. How uplifting!* And, no surprise, I did some incredible work for him because we had a vibrant, encouraging relationship. The man I worked for right after him was the opposite. The first words he said to me were, ‘I’ve heard you were good. I’m going to see if I can trip you up.’ And I said, ‘Really? That’s the most inspiring thing anyone’s ever said to me.’ I worked for him for a year. It was ugly. It wasn’t fun; he was constantly drawing my weaknesses to my attention.”

## *Faith-at-Work Practices*

- “So the way I express my faith—and I learned this from an incredible missionary in Nigeria—I said, ‘How do you lead from your faith in a country that’s hostile to our faith? You could be killed for this faith.’ And he said, ‘Oh Cheryl, just speak in scriptures but never cite chapter and verse.’ And up until that moment, I didn’t know how to evangelize in my corporate world. But that became my premise. I give an award in the company called the Grasshopper Award. And when I give it, I say, ‘The inspiration for this reward comes from a favorite quote I have that says God has the whole world in his hands and that we are mere grasshoppers.’ That’s in the Bible book of Isaiah. But I never say *Isaiah*. And then I give them a button with a grasshopper and a little plaque to put on their desks, and

I celebrate the accomplishments of introverts—of people who don't love the spotlight.”

- This personal trial story sums it up best: “One of the best epiphanies in my life came from trials and difficult times. I had this collision of events—I was diagnosed with breast cancer—and had challenges at work when I was running a retail food chain. I got brought to my knees by the physical illness, and I got fired shortly thereafter. So it was a really tough, tough time, and your tough times bring you flat on your face. A friend of mine brought over *The Purpose Driven Life* during my radiation treatments because everybody was reading it. And I was a skeptic about it. I didn't know much about Rick Warren, but one day, I opened it to give it a shot and saw on the first page 'It's not about you.' And I literally heard it in my head with my name attached to it. 'It's not about you, Cheryl.' And it was life reframing. I mean, of course it's not about me, but I needed a wake-up call that God's purposes and plans are his. I am one of his instruments, and I am called to serve him, but the purpose of my life is what impact I'm going to have on others. And that's it. It's not about whether I'm happy. Nothing about serving God is easy or convenient or brings you a whole batch of comfort and happiness. Get over it, you know? But boy, I needed that lesson, and it was, I believe, the whole purpose of the mess of my life at that moment. Then the message was 'Let's regroup, Cheryl, and get this straight. Because if you can serve my purpose, we can do some pretty interesting things together.'”

### *What She Wants Other Christian Businesswomen to Know*

- Joshua 1:9 (NIV) says, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”
- Stay in the word. She uses a phone app called Prayer Prompter. “Study God's word consistently. It's the source of

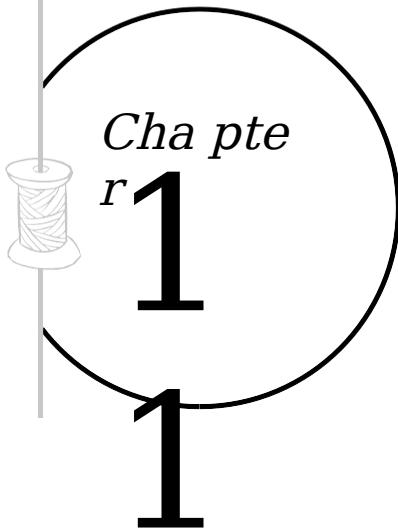
all direction in this life. Everything else is confusing."

- God designed you for a purpose—his purpose. “If you figure that out with your God, he will use you in such a powerful way. And this is in every place in your life—in your home, in your community, in your church, and in your work. God will use you if you let him put ‘the way you are designed’ to work.”
- Your calling is between you and God alone. “You do not need to respond to or live by all these other voices. Jesus says, ‘Take up your mantle; follow me.’ He didn’t say, ‘Check in with the sixteen people in your community who have an opinion about you.’ He didn’t say anything about that. He even said those really difficult words. ‘What if you have to turn from your family to follow me?’ And I don’t want to do that, but he made it really clear that ‘Follow me’ is the first, foremost, the most important thing.”
- The only judgment to fear is God’s judgment. “He is the only judge we must and should fear, so let us be governed by the judgment of God alone. I want to bottle that and sell it to women because they need so much to know where they are with their Creator.”

### *What She Would Like to Have Known at the Beginning of Her Career*

- Just how amazing God is. “You know, he can make beauty out of messes—and I’ve had a few messes—and he redeems all of our snafus, all of our bad judgements, all of our selfishness, because he’s up to something so much bigger than what we are up to. So just the amazing word of God.”
- Worrying is useless. “I’m still working on this: ‘What if I stop worrying so much and just trust him?’ You can’t scripturally be worried and trust God at the same time. And I’m a really good worrier. But yet, what if we just let it go? How powerful that could be if we could just be free to let God rule and worry less daily.”





## Threads of Wisdom

After interviewing, writing, and reading all the chapters, it seemed as if there were threads woven through all the women leaders' stories, commonalities about who they are, what they do, and how they do it. This matrix clearly shows and summarizes the who, what, and how of these faith-based leaders.

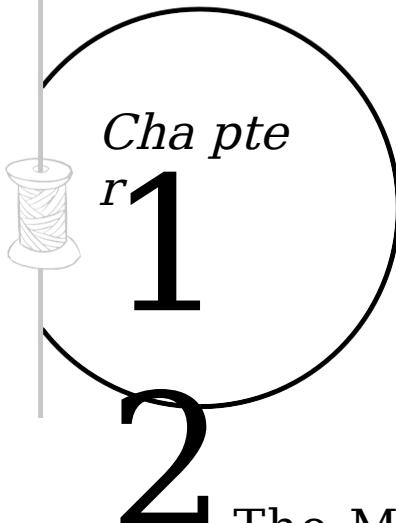
<b>Who They Are</b>	<b>What They Do</b>	<b>How They Do It</b>
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Godly	They listen to God.	They pray and then listen and take action on what God leads them to do.  They have team prayer over company issues, directions, and plans.  They lead meetings with prayer and thanksgiving.
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<b>Who They Are</b>	<b>What They Do</b>	<b>How They Do It</b>
Teachable	They have a mentor.	They pray for a mentor. Then they keep their eyes open for an answer.  They ask someone they admire to be their mentor.
Humble	They have servant leadership.	They put the team first: their needs. They develop their skills, listen, and create a road map for each member to reach his or her vision and develop his or her God-given gifts.
Self-led	They know their priorities. The most common values set among these leaders are the following: 1. God 2. Family 3. Mission or work	They have their priorities straight and manage their lives and time accordingly.  Prayer lives, self-care, and family time are in the mix. They set boundaries around these.

Courageous	<p>They try new things, take risks, ask for what they want, and fail forward.</p>	<p>They create an environment of encouraging new ideas, where team members lead and new ideas are tried without consequence.</p> <p>Failure is debriefed and reviewed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Why did it happen?</li><li>2. Learn from why.</li><li>3. Move on.</li></ol>
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<b>Who They Are</b>	<b>What They Do</b>	<b>How They Do It</b>
Listener	They listen to God, peers, mentors, and team members.	<p>They know they don't have all the answers.</p> <p>They are curious and ask good questions.</p> <p>They are listening more than speaking.</p>
Values based	<p>They embody their values. The most common values set among these leaders are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transparency</li> <li>• honesty</li> <li>• integrity</li> <li>• authenticity</li> </ul>	<p>They live their personal values at work.</p> <p>They have values that all see and know.</p> <p>Their company has a set of values that all see, understand, and represent.</p>
Lifelong learner	They read, watch, listen, and try new things.	<p>They promote book study groups.</p> <p>Each team member has a vision and plan to realize it.</p> <p>Part of team member compensation is tied to learning.</p>
Possesses deep self-knowledge	They know themselves, including their strengths and weaknesses, gifts, and talents.	<p>They hire according to their weaknesses.</p> <p>They hire based on the needs of the team or company and on the person's strengths.</p> <p>Team members lead down paths of self-knowledge via assessments, such as StrengthFinder, DISC, and spiritual gifts and talents assessments.</p>



## The Most Powerful Lessons from Their Mentors

- ❖ Be clear on who leads you.
- ❖ Commit to excellence, not perfection. “If I [Cheryl D. J.] work for perfection in a corporate atmosphere, meaning I would triple-check our statistics and facts before they’re published, then I have at least ten times that obligation doing work for God.”
- ❖ Don’t panic—there’s always going to be conflict. [Deena R.] “There are always going to be problems that come your way, but whatever happens, don’t panic. Relax, take a deep breath, let a couple of days pass, and see if you still feel the same way you did when it initially happened.”
- ❖ Don’t take things at face value; ask questions to understand. “For example, with an expense report, it wasn’t just the numbers but what the purpose was behind them, and did this make common sense that something would cost that much? She taught me to really probe down to making sure that whatever I [Eleanor M.] was doing, I understood completely before I signed off on it.”
- ❖ Embody Proverbs 31’s noble characteristics of a Christian

woman in the workplace: being wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove.

- ❖ Have a mentor or coach help re-state and edit your goals, initiatives, ambitions, needs, and discontent based on their seasoned perspective.
- ❖ Learn how to create a successful work environment. [Cheryl B.] “Working for two very different bosses early in my career, back to back, really caused me to understand how to create an environment for success. The first boss got our best—he got fabulous work out of us, and it took the company to new heights. The second boss, who demeaned us, was condescending to us and told us we were all as stupid as rocks. Each staff member left and went on to run and lead other companies.”
- ❖ Humility. “I [Cheryl D.J.] understand that I am no better and no worse than everyone around me, and I think this truth draws people in.”
- ❖ Influence is based on trust. “Trust comes from integrity and transparency. People have to trust us; we have to have integrity. And those things really do come from our walk with the Lord. But if people can truly see that we are who we say we are, there’s no double-mindedness, and then they can respect us. I [Sherri H.] believe that helps to influence their lives and maybe follow in a similar way. Don’t make decisions based on emotions. Address the situation in a couple days after you’ve calmed down.”
- ❖ Just do what you say you’re going to do. [Shannon M.] “It speaks to your credibility, your commitment, and how you value that person.”
- ❖ Leadership is influence. [Sherri H.] “If we’re not able to impact people’s lives to influence them, if we are walking and no one’s following, or if we think we’re a leader and no one’s following us, we’re probably not doing something right.”
- ❖ Mother Teresa told me [Lori S.M.], “You Americans love your notebooks. You fill them up and take your notes and put them on the shelf. Just pray and obey.”
- ❖ “Pastor Kevin Myers of 12Stone Church told me [Cynthia B.K.] early on that our lives with God are like the crust of the pizza.”

Most times we think of a slice—church as a slice, my work as  
a

slice, my family as a slice. And that's how we live—with these slices. But our relationship with God is really the crust of our lives. It's not a slice. And I was like, 'Oh, yeah, that's a good visual' because I was treating it as 'God, you get Sunday, and that's it.' It's not a religion; it's not a slice. It's a relationship with the Creator of the universe.' And I started thinking, *If I could really have a relationship with the Creator of the universe, I want that.*"

- ❖ Learn from the "un-mentor." "I [Janet W.B.] had a boss that I thought did some things that I wanted to do very differently. So I think I learned an awful lot of what not to do by not having a good mentor but having one that was to the contrary."
- ❖ Take yourself seriously. "A good friend of mine [Beth H.] calls it 'championing your own life.' When I discuss issues, particularly with my older mentors, they often reframe them for me with language and perspective that enable me to take myself more seriously and more credibly than I might otherwise. We tend to be least generous with ourselves, don't we?"
- ❖ The mouth is a powerful tool. It can hurt, or it can raise people up.
- ❖ The power of encouragement. "My [Cynthia B.K.] mother often told me: 'You can do it, you can try that, you can go there, you can travel, you can study.'"
- ❖ We should actually care about people. "I'm [Shannon M.] always concerned about what other people think. When you establish those relationships in business, it affords you the opportunity to be real and to make mistakes but without condemnation."
- ❖ Ecclesiastes 4:9 (NIV) says, "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor."
- ❖ Your personality must stay under God's leadership and authority.





3

## How They Learned Leadership

- ❖ From a male mentor, a businessman in management who attended her [Eleanor M.] church
- ❖ By being the oldest child in her [Cheryl B.] family and the oldest of the cousins
- ❖ By trial and error and learning from it
- ❖ From Dr. Lee Warren books
- ❖ From every John Maxwell book ever written
- ❖ From experience. "The very best teacher for me [Deena R.] is experience and just knowing that my drive teaches me more than any book can ever teach me."
- ❖ From Cynthia B. K.'s parents, who were a great influence on her. "My father being an entrepreneur really put no restraints on me growing up. He felt and made me feel like I could do anything I put my mind to."
- ❖ From her [Lori S. M.] father, Reverend Gerald Marvel
- ❖ From her [Lori S.M.] first mentor, Randy Hood, her youth pastor
- ❖ From P&G's management training program. "They invested in teaching me [Cheryl B.] leadership skills—how you run a good meeting, what a good budget looks like,

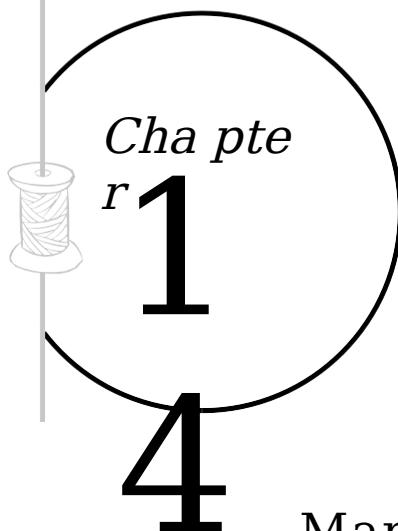
how you work in a team, etc."

- ❖ From the competitive team sports Cynthia B. K. played.
- ❖ From the discipline of practice and music theory.  
“Music theory is math; music practice is an incredible discipline, and the expression of music is quite visionary—you’re creating something. So in me [Cheryl B.], you do see a musician. I often talk about music as a word picture for how I lead, because I was prepared by music to be a leader.”
- ❖ By the skills God gave and people he sent to help bring those skills about. “Now, I always prayed that he would help me [Eleanor M.] become the person that he created me to be, and that’s still one of my prayers. And by doing that, I guess it released the ability for God to send those people and I was open to having them teach me.”
- ❖ By her [ Janet W.B.] Christian CEO roundtable.
- ❖ Through leadership conferences
- ❖ By making mistakes. “I [Beth H.] often pray that God uses every ounce of the pain and consequences of my mistakes to give me an even greater measure of wisdom in return. A colleague shared a quote with me recently that says, ‘Experience is the toughest teacher because it gives you the test before it gives you the lesson.’”
- ❖ From Michael Hyatt publications
- ❖ From one’s faith. “My faith gave me the best platform for leadership because I finally understood whom I was really following” [Cheryl D.J.].
- ❖ From Proverbs. Beth H. reads a Proverb every day. She says Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are wonderful business books.
- ❖ By reading John Maxwell books
- ❖ By reading personal growth books, business books, articles, and trade magazines.
- ❖ By serving with Mother Teresa and asking her questions [Lori S. M.]
- ❖ By studying [Beth H.] the biblical leadership styles of Moses, Joseph, David, and Daniel
- ❖ By always seeking out people who were smarter than she was [Shannon M.] to learn from. She was always looking to people

who had been doing what she had been doing much longer and much better than she and learning from them.

- ❖ From a mentor. Shannon M. often had a mentor - either one on one or a roundtable of peers.
- ❖ By reading a lot. Shannon M. has quarterly book studies with her team on business.
- ❖ By seeking out peer group settings with like-minded people who challenge her [Shannon M.].
- ❖ From the book *Ordering Your Private World* by Gordon MacDonald
- ❖ From the management training course while at Liberty Insurance.
- ❖ From the Women Presidents Organization, where she [Eleanor M.] learns best practices.
- ❖ Through personal mentors from work and church.
- ❖ By watching and observing good leaders such as mentor Pastor Kevin Myers. "I [Cheryl D. J.] realized early on that the title didn't matter. I wanted to work for real leaders, not title leaders."
- ❖ By watching other leaders. "Learning from their successes and their mistakes and learning from others saves tons of time from my [Beth H.] having to learn it firsthand."





## Management Approaches

- ❖ Be a servant leader.
- ❖ Be as flexible as possible but hold people accountable.  
“They have to be held accountable. I [Deena R.] think one of the worst things as a leader you can do is to let an employee get away with something that goes against what you hold to be important. A lot of leaders think they’re being flexible, but if you let one employee get away with something and then other employees see that, they think, *But I thought that was a rule, so I guess it’s not.*”
- ❖ Be authentic and honest.
- ❖ Be bold for what you believe in; do not settle for the status quo.
- ❖ Be joyful and keep your sense of humor. “I [Sherri H.] believe joy and levity are essential to just continuing to thrive in every way—spiritually, personally, and professionally—in your organization.”
- ❖ Believe in synergism:  $1 + 1 = 4$ . When two people come together, the result is larger than what either can do alone.
- ❖ Have values. CLI has six core values: integrity, teamwork, volunteers, prayer, growth, and joy.
- ❖ Learn about collaboration versus hierarchy.
- ❖ Make corporate decisions by prayerful consensus.

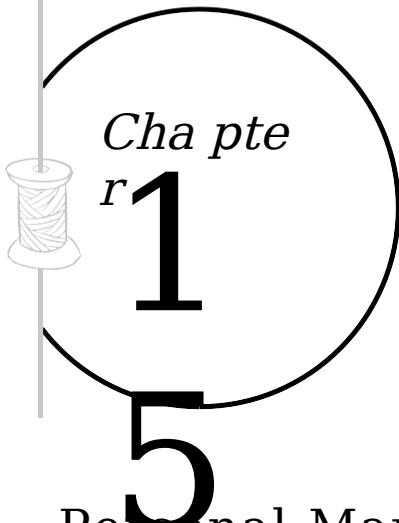
- ❖ Be sure every team member adds something. If somebody has a gift, encourage that and support it. "You know, even with my kids, I [Cynthia B. K.] try to say, 'What are you wired for? What are you passionate about? And let's try to encourage that and make that happen.'"
- ❖ Have fun but work hard.
- ❖ Have a teachable spirit. "As a team, we [Sherri H.] look for opportunities to get together, and we're all learning and growing, and I'm growing with them. I don't ever see myself as if I've arrived."
- ❖ Have the right focus. Her [Lori S.M.] personal priorities are celebration, excellence, and depth. A quote by Dr. Lyle Dorsett sums them up perfectly: "If you will focus on the depth of your ministry, God will take care of the breadth of your ministry."
- ❖ Have the right priorities. Her [Sherri H.] top values and priorities are faith and family.
- ❖ Hire great people and let them do their job.
- ❖ Be honest.
- ❖ Have integrity.
- ❖ Exhibit the right perspective. "It's not about me [Eleanor M.]; it's about honoring God with my work."
- ❖ Lead everyone on a personal purpose and principles process to define his or her work vision and values. "We [Cheryl B.] ask everyone to go on a journey to personal purpose and principles. We write those down. We ask him or her to look at three things: his or her life experiences—we do lifelines. Pertaining to work, based on the themes of your life, what have you learned that has created who you are at work and want to be at work?"
- ❖ Have a defined company purpose: Popeyes has a defined company purpose and principles that guide all team members.
- ❖ Ask questions. Shannon M. believes leaders ask questions (and managers answer them).
- ❖ Don't think you have all the answers. Shannon M. doesn't believe she does.

- ❖ Focus on empowering others. Shannon M. focuses on empowering each team member and continually ensuring he

or she has goals and that she is doing everything she can to help him or her meet them.

- ❖ Be open and honest. Shannon M. is open and honest with the team members and balances that quality with credibility.
- ❖ Stay humble.
- ❖ Surround yourself with other good leaders and put them in your organization—not necessarily just within your organization but also around you to teach you.
- ❖ Be team focused and team led.
- ❖ Hire the right people. The Jim Collins theory is to get the right people on the bus and worry about which seat best suits their gifts and talents later. “Make sure you don’t just hire for the position but hire brilliant, fabulous people who know and use their gifts. Discover your strengths. Andy Stanley writes about the importance of not trying to make people something they’re not. Identify what people are best at and then customize their work, roles, and jobs as much toward that as possible and get somebody else to do the things those folks (and you) aren’t good at.” [Beth H.]
- ❖ Treat people how you would like to be treated.
- ❖ Use assessments on all your team members for the best fit. Cheryl B. uses Clifton StrengthsFinder and Standout by Marcus Buckingham.





## 5 Personal Management Philosophies

- ❖ The values of Janet W. B. are integrity, compassion, listening, responsiveness, and making the complex simple.
- ❖ Being transparent. *"You have to be transparent in your thinking: I'm following God, and I'm waiting on him to help me make this decision, and you need to come follow me when he tells me where we're going, or We're going here because this is what we need to be doing, and I truly believe that God leads us that way"* [Eleanor M.].
- ❖ "God continues to ask me [Cheryl D. J.] to show up and tell the truth in love."
- ❖ "Have your employees' best interests at heart. Then your team will follow because they want to" [Eleanor M.].
- ❖ Cheryl B's work values are legacy, integrity, and growth.
- ❖ "I [Cynthia B. K.] surround myself with people who are smarter than I am in the areas I'm not good at."
- ❖ "I [Lori S.M.] take intentional time with my self-leadership. My relationship with God is part of that self-leadership, but it's my number one priority. I learned from a previous husband and other leaders in my life who displayed unhealthy self-leadership."

- ❖ Lead like you would your own children. “I [Deena R.] always tell my people, ‘I treat you like I would my own children,’ and I try to be a mother to my business people like I do my own

kids. And that style is just to be compassionate and fair but hold them accountable.”

- ❖ “More than anything, the core of leadership is integrity. I [Deena R.] think it’s easy to be a good person when everything’s going right, but I always teach my children—you can ask any of the three of them what the definition of integrity is, and they’ll always tell you it’s the thing you’ll do when no one’s looking.”
- ❖ “My [Cynthia B. K.] leadership role is player or coach. We’re very similar to how a sports team is run, and when you build that, there’s a lot of loyalty, and you look out for each other. And you’ve got a goal, and you’re trying to move the ball down the field. In our weekly meetings, we ref lect and think, *We gained some yardage this week, but we lost some yardage too. Not sure if we’re net positive, you know?*”
- ❖ “Proverbs says, ‘Good decisions are made with the advice of many wise counselors.’ I [Beth H.] consult the scriptures first. (I’ve learned so much from the management dilemmas and styles of Moses, Joseph, and David … Imagine being Moses and trying to manage a million Jews in a forty-year tour across the desert.) Then I consult wise advisers and learn from the experiences of other leaders—I love reading biographies for this purpose. I learn the most not when I’m the smartest person in the room but when I’m the dumbest.” She admits to her staff when she doesn’t know the answer or the next step. “I don’t feel like I have to have all the answers to lead, and if I can say that honestly, then everything moves forward.”
- ❖ Shannon M. believes leaders ask questions (and managers answer them).
- ❖ Shannon M. doesn’t believe she has all the answers.
- ❖ Shannon M. focuses on empowering each team member and continually ensuring that he or she has goals and that she is doing everything she can to help them meet them.
- ❖ Shannon M. is open and honest with them and balances that quality with credibility.

- ❖ Cheryl D. J. looks at everything she does in her life, career, and home and asks, "Is this really what God wants me to do today?"

- ❖ Cheryl D. J. admits to her staff when she doesn't know the answer or the next step. "I don't feel like I have to have all the answers to lead, and if I can say that honestly, then everything moves forward."
- ❖ Strengths, strengths, strengths. "That's my [Cheryl B.] worldview. Everybody is created with strengths. You can work your whole life on your weaknesses, and they might improve by 15 percent. So work on your strengths and put them to the best use."
- ❖ "The first thing I [Lori S.M.] question when I meet, read of, or hear someone is, 'Where is this person in his or her depth? Who is he or she?' Because what the person does isn't as important as who he or she is."
- ❖ Build and sow into the employees and then focus on growth within the business. "I [Deena R.] think you have to focus on the people, and then you have to focus on the business."
- ❖ "To humble myself and surrender my life to Christ. Then he literally fills me with his Spirit, which allows me to have all of the qualities I [Sherri H.] feel like are so essential in leadership."
- ❖ Vision. Cynthia B. K. casts a God-led vision and then collects the most talented people to join her in going after it. "People want to be a part of something bigger than themselves, and I do too. I think I'm more about 'Where are we going?' than 'What am I doing?'"
- ❖ Work from purpose and principles.





## Leadership Influences

- ❖ An academic essay, "Servant as Leader," by Robert Greenleaf (<https://www.greenleaf.org/products-page/the-servant-as-leader/>), which is required reading for all staff members at Miles Advisory Group.
- ❖ Author Beth Moore
- ❖ Author Jim Collins and his books, *Good to Great*, *Built to Last*, and so forth.
- ❖ Author John Maxwell books
- ❖ A subscription to *Minute with Maxwell* daily e-mails
- ❖ Dan Dorden, Sherri H.'s previous counseling center director
- ❖ Dozens of biographies of leaders from Churchill to Rockefeller, from Barbara Walters to the Wright Brothers, from Coach Tom Landry to CBS founder William Paley [Beth H.]
- ❖ Dr. E. C. Sheehan, pastor emeritus at Ingleside Baptist Church in Macon, Georgia. He was a leader in all things spiritual in the life of Sherri H. for years.
- ❖ Dr. Howard Eyrich, director of counseling at Briarwood Presbyterian Church
- ❖ Dr. Lee Warren books

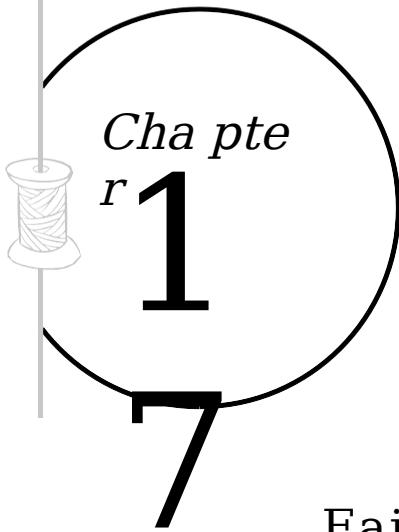
- ❖ God. "It's not my [Eleanor M.] journey; it's God's journey. I'm on the journey, but he's the one who has prepared me for every step along the way."
- ❖ Cheryl B's bosses, the best and the rest.
- ❖ Cheryl B's father, Max Stanton, who was the most important mentor in her life.
- ❖ Cynthia B. K.'s youth pastors, Hayward and Diane Miller, who were very strong leaders, with strong character. They were very authentic.
- ❖ Eleanor M.'s prayer partner. "She worked with the Salvation Army during Hurricane Katrina, so she's got a lot of stories, but she really motivated me by telling me constantly, 'Eleanor, you've got so much more to give than you're giving. You're limiting yourself.' And she would tell me that all the time. And finally, one day I began to believe her. And she would say, 'Ask for what you need. Don't be afraid. Ask for what you need. Don't ask for more but always ask for what you need, and God will find a way to give it to you.'"
- ❖ Janet W. B.'s previous partner and the split with him. "If you, as the captain of the ship, can appear strong and steady no matter how bad the storm, then everybody else is willing to follow that, right? If you have somebody who is leading in such a way that the behavior is appropriate to emulate, then that allows things, even in the face of difficult or potentially impossible circumstances, to still have forward motion."
- ❖ Shannon M.'s female mentors—women managers and senior saleswomen at a health care IT company
- ❖ Sherri H.'s husband Harry Hall, a project management trainer and speaker.
- ❖ Kevin Myers, pastor of 12Stone Church
- ❖ Leadership books by Andy Stanley, including *Choosing to Cheat: Who Wins When Family and Work Collide?*
- ❖ Michael Hyatt publications
- ❖ "My [Beth H.] parents, Ken and Sue Bragg; my mentors, Jim Webb, a former HR executive with Procter and

Gamble, and Ann Platz, businesswoman, speaker, author; my husband, Todd,

a servant-leader of our home and of his amazing real estate company; executive coach Caroline Mendez; and my friend Suzanne Schuman White, COO of her beautiful household, who has always been wise beyond her years. I am a mentor because my parents and others have so generously mentored me and so many others. Because of the skills I learned from all of them, I'm mentoring very aggressively now in my life. A privilege."

- ❖ Pastor Kevin Myers, 12Stone Church
- ❖ The book *Now Discover Your Strengths* by Marcus Buckingham
- ❖ Personal mentors from work and church
- ❖ Verne Harish and the Gazelles Growth Institute three-year MIT program and yearly growth summits
- ❖ When it comes to who has influenced Shannon M.'s leadership the most, she points to Jesus. Her approach and posture are of a servant-leader—in serving not only her staff but also the clients and partners of Miles Advisory Group.





## Faith-at-Work Practices

- ❖ In a faith-based nonprofit, faith and work go hand in hand. It is the reason they do what they do to serve God and mankind. Publicly, they [Cheryl D.J.] pray before the audience at each event, which a pastor leads.
- ❖ Christian-based billboard advertising during the Christmas season [Janet W.B.]
- ❖ Constantly being in prayer. “I believe that you have to have almost constant prayer—constant communication. And it’s something that God built into me early. And when I face something I’m not sure about, I’m always saying, ‘God, give me the right word, give me the wisdom, and help me do this. I don’t know how to do this; give me the wisdom. I need to do it’” [Eleanor M.].
- ❖ Dedicated alone time with the Lord, using a journal to document the dialog. “You have to have a time that’s set aside where you truly communicate with God about what you need and what you want to offer him, that you’re here for him, and these are my thoughts. I use a journal, often using a blank journal page to record our interaction. And I incorporate that into my leadership because I pray over the decisions I make”

[Eleanor M.].

- ❖ Encouragement for each staff member to have daily quiet time in the morning [Lori S.M.]
- ❖ The establishment of Summit University internally: staff read books on becoming better leaders, believers, and people. Monthly discussion groups are good [Lori S.M.].
- ❖ Janet W. B.'s firm tithes 10 percent off the total gross revenue versus the net income (after expenses).
- ❖ Janet W. B's testimony is posted on the JWB Law website.
- ❖ Here's a brief tidbit that shows how faith and God run Cheryl D. J.'s organization: "It is a never-ending task to raise funds for a nonprofit, and we started this nonprofit in a recession. As we hired people and grew, I felt a tremendous obligation to support our people, who needed their paychecks, and because I believed in the work we were doing. Over the years, we've gotten down to one paycheck before, and you know what? We got down on our knees, and I said, 'If God's in it, he will support it. If he's not, then we all need to move on anyway.' I think that through the power of our faith, we have never chased money. We have never gone after grants that were outside our vision and mission just for the money. It was tempting, but we never did it. It was a stretch, because it was very stressful at times, but God always came through."
- ❖ One suggestion is to hold weekly Bible study in the office, open to all employees (optional, not mandatory). [Deena R.]
- ❖ "I don't pray a lot publicly. I think it's great for those who do. I might mention to the team, 'Let's really pray about such and such,' or I'll just be walking and go, 'We'll need God's favor on this, and God, we need your wisdom,' while I'm talking. It's like I'm walking through it, and I'll just say, 'God, I'm about to go into this meeting. Give me favor and wisdom on how to talk through this'" [Cynthia B.K.]
- ❖ "I don't 'integrate' prayer into what I do—I start with prayer, cover it in prayer, and follow it up with prayer. Prayer *is* the work. John 15:5 (NIV) says it all: 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do

nothing.' Yup, I've tried

it both ways. It always works best with God in the lead. So the prayer comes in, asking for the right kind of work. The prayer comes when the inquiry comes about the work. The prayer comes when I'm deciding whether to take the work. The prayer comes: 'Okay, Lord, I've taken the work; what's the best direction to lead this work?' The prayer comes: 'Lord, give me some new creative strategies for this work.' The prayer comes: 'Now I've got to present this strategy; help me to speak clearly and do it well.' The prayer comes: 'Help me build the right team.' The prayer comes: 'Lord, I've done everything I can; now you're going to have to bring the result'" [Beth H.].

- ❖ Janet W. B. has intentional, consistent prayer time at work with her team. "On the first Tuesday of the month, we have what we call 'His first fruits prayer.' And each member of the tithe team takes an hour, a different hour, and with a couple of other friends, we have about eight solid hours of prayer that occur on that first Tuesday. And we have lists of our staff and issues they have. We have big issues like things around the world that are problematic. We have our vendors. We have our clients listed. We have the nonprofits we support, and then each of us spends an hour alone in one of our conference rooms, focusing on God and those particular intercessions."
- ❖ Janet W. B. prays at work in a conference room every Monday at nine thirty in the morning for a half hour, which models and sets the tone for the firm and team.
- ❖ Personally, as a leader, she [Shannon M.] cites her called4women's group (monthly Christian businesswomen's executive roundtable) as the most consistent practical integration point she uses to view her leadership through the filter of faith and to make sure, if there's anything off, it gets recalibrated.
- ❖ Personally, it takes a half day each week in extended prayer time to hear the Lord's guidance in counseling issues for each client [Sherri H.].
- ❖ Personally, there are five practices Lori S.M. does weekly: prayer,

- ❖ Bible study, scripture memorization, reading, and solitude.
- ❖ Prayer in weekly staff meetings

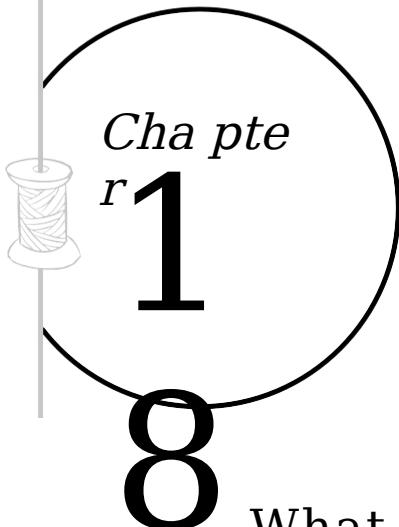
- ❖ Prayer before meals with staff and before meetings. Deena R. will preface it with, "If there's anyone here that's offended by this, let me know and we can address that, but as a leader here, I'd like to pray over my lunch, or I'd like to pray for this meeting."
- ❖ Prayers for each staff member and client [Sherri H.]
- ❖ Prayers for the business and for God's will and leading in it.
- ❖ Reading faith-related books, such as *Spiritual Leadership* by Henry and Richard Blackaby
- ❖ Cynthia B. K. spends regular time with God. "I do it in the morning first thing. It's not oodles amount of time, but I just try to connect and give the day to him and have gratitude and thank him."
- ❖ "So the way I [Cheryl B.] express my faith—and I learned this from an incredible missionary in Nigeria—I said, 'How do you lead from your faith in a country that's hostile to our faith? You could be killed for this faith.' And he said, 'Oh Cheryl, just speak in scriptures but never cite chapter and verse.' And up until that moment, I didn't know how to evangelize in my corporate world. But that became my premise".
- ❖ Take your business prayer list before God. "I [Eleanor M.] am always bringing my business related requests before God, saying, 'This is what I'm asking you to do for your business.' And remembering that it's not about me; it may not be what 'me' wants to do, but if he's urging me to go in that direction, that's where I should be going to lead the business.
- ❖ Miles Advisory Group is up front about the hiring process when screening applicants. As they like to say, "You don't have to be a Christian to join our team, but this is what we do, and this is how we do it, so it can't be offensive to you."
- ❖ This personal trial story sums it up best: "One of the best epiphanies in my [Cheryl B.] life came from trials and difficult times. I had this collision of events—I was diagnosed with breast cancer—and had challenges at work when I was

running a retail food chain. I got brought to my knees by the physical illness, and I got fired shortly thereafter. So it was a really tough,

tough time, and your tough times bring you flat on your face. A friend of mine brought over *The Purpose Driven Life* during my radiation treatments because everybody was reading it. And I was a skeptic about it. I didn't know much about Rick Warren, but one day, I opened it to give it a shot and saw on the first page, 'It's not about you.' And I literally heard it in my head with my name attached to it. 'It's not about you, Cheryl.' And it was life reframing. I mean, of course it's not about me, but I needed a wake-up call that God's purposes and plans are his. I am one of his instruments, and I am called to serve him, but the purpose of my life is what impact I'm going to have on others. And that's it. It's not about whether I'm happy. Nothing about serving God is easy or convenient or brings you a whole batch of comfort and happiness. Get over it, you know? But boy, I needed that lesson, and it was, I believe, the whole purpose of the mess of my life at that moment. Then the message was 'Let's regroup, Cheryl, and get this straight. Because if you can serve my purpose, we can do some pretty interesting things together'".

- ❖ Weekly for twenty minutes, Lori S.M. has smaller groups of staff pray for all the investors, volunteers, and each other.
- ❖ When it comes to faith at work, the staff at Miles Advisory Group pray openly and often in their team, leadership, and corporate meetings. Shannon M. personally prays for her team members. When Shannon and Bryan have big decisions through the course of the weeks, months, and years, they pray together over them.
- ❖ A yearly, paid, personal four-hour retreat for staff
- ❖ Yearly twenty-one-day fast and prayer (all staff, volunteers, and board members)





## What They Want Christian Businesswomen to Know

- ❖ “Women sometimes have to have all the answers in order to take action, and that’s not life, and that’s not fair because God teaches us all along the way. We get paralyzed by this need to look like we have it all together, to look like we’ve got all the answers—that never-let-them-see-you-sweat kind of thing because it’s scary when you’re vulnerable. But if you do it in an appropriate way, there’s a lot of strength in that. Just have direction and a good compass to say where you’re off, that the Lord can lead and direct you as you move” [Shannon M.].
- ❖ “Just get out there and try it and don’t be afraid to fail. How do you even know if it’s going to work until you get out there and start trying it? I remember days of scraping up change to buy bread growing up. So for me, I had nothing to lose. I already have now more than I ever could have imagined in my entire life. So what’s the harm in going out there and trying something new?” [Shannon M.].
- ❖ Allow yourself some grace to just be you. “When I try to be somebody else, I am going to fail. So just be yourself—your best self—and move forward” [Cheryl D.J.].

- ❖ Be careful not to sabotage your own success. Don't be afraid of big results, budgets, and fruit. Just make sure the priority of it is in the right order.
- ❖ Be unapologetic about the things you're really good at. Don't have a false humility about them; have a right humility about them.
- ❖ Christian businesswomen should know it's okay to put your family first. "It's okay. And it's okay to think of careers that way because there are a lot of other women out there who did that. I [Deena R.] always put my kids first. My kids never suffered because I had a career. But do put your family first and don't think that you're sacrificing your career because God will open the doors at the right time when your children are gone. Don't feel like, *My résumé is going to suffer if I do that*, because God will figure that out".
- ❖ Communicate! "I know a lot of people don't like confrontation, and they avoid talking to people, but you've got to communicate" [Cynthia B.K.].
- ❖ Continue to listen to feedback and criticism, even when it feels like a personal attack. Ask yourself, "Is there something of value here?"
- ❖ Enjoy and feed the relationships in your life. "Leadership is hard. Building a business is hard, but if you'll enjoy those relationships, those are the good things God gives you while you're working through the hard. He gives you people who love you and have a heart for God just like you, and you need to develop, retain, and lean on those people" [Eleanor M.].
- ❖ Failure will not kill you; it makes you stronger.
- ❖ Focus on the win-win versus being right.
- ❖ Give yourself "permission to fly" or go get permission to fly from someone you respect and trust. This is a kind of "rubber stamp" from a person you believe and trust, to give yourself permission to go after bigger goals and the outrageous vision you have!
- ❖ God is faithful. "I would want them to always remember that" [Eleanor M.].

- ❖ “God is really your provider, and if he is, then he’s going to open the right door for you, and you have to just have that blind faith and depend on him to provide—not just money but the opportunity you need. No matter what job you’re in, even if it looks like entry level, do the very best job you can do in that position because I never, ever had the expectation that I was going to be president. I mean, I didn’t climb a ladder; I catapulted from the bottom all the way to the top within six months, and that was unheard of. So you never know how the Lord’s going to grow you” [Deena R.].
- ❖ “God is so big. And I think we do not appreciate that bigness inside of us—that God is a God of creativity, that he made whales and giraffes and hippopotami and lion fish and thunder and snow and all these unbelievably creative, fabulous things for our enjoyment. And that if we can realize that that creativity is inside of us, and that power of Jesus Christ is there too” [Janet W.B.].
- ❖ “I don’t look for people’s approval. I don’t know why. That’s just in my DNA. Not that that’s always good. I do try to look for God’s approval” [Cynthia B.K.].
- ❖ Joshua 1:9 (NIV) says, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”
- ❖ Know that nobody starts out great, even in an area of giftedness. Get all the training and credentialing you can, ask for an honest critique, request help, seek feedback, and ask questions.
- ❖ Learn self-leadership. “Self-leadership is imperative, and the hardest person to lead is ourselves. We’d rather lead up, lead beside, and lead down, but leading inward is the most difficult thing” [Lori S.M.].
- ❖ Let people see your heart and know that you care. If you do, they’ll tend to be gracious, listen to you, and try to work something out.
- ❖ Listen to God and do what he says, no matter how small or big. We are in charge of our obedience and faithfulness;

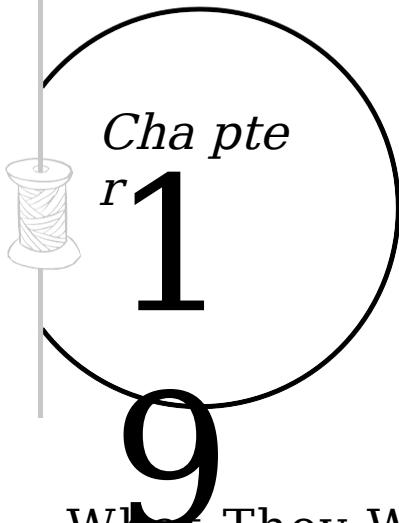
he is in charge of the results.

- ❖ Live one integrated life and be one integrated person, not different people. Don't wear too many hats. Be consistent and congruent wherever you are.
- ❖ Number your days aright so that you can make wise decisions. Psalm 90:12 (NIV) says, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." It is a verse you don't latch onto until middle age, but if you can, latch onto that in your teens or twenties and see that your days are short—life is short. And realize you have a limited number of days and pray for the wisdom to maximize each of those days.
- ❖ Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."
- ❖ Start with God's word and do that in your business. "If we operate from obedience to the word and remember that we have the greatest friend there who is to help us run these organizations, that serves us the best. We need to get God back in our business, not take him out. The world has said, 'Take him out.' And I think that's completely contrary to how the kingdom of God is going to be advanced" [Janet W.B.].
- ❖ Stay in the word. Chery. B. uses a phone app called Prayer Prompter. "Study God's word consistently. It's the source of all direction in this life. Everything else is confusing."
- ❖ Stretch yourself. "Christian businesswomen need to be all that they can be while keeping that balance in their lives. Join professional organizations and volunteer for nonprofit projects that challenge and stretch you." [Eleanor M.]
- ❖ The only judgment to fear is God's judgment. "He is the only judge we must and should fear, so let us be governed by the judgment of God alone. And you know, I want to bottle that and sell it to women because they need so much to know where they are with their Creator" [Cheryl B.].
- ❖ "Trust the passion and the vision God's given you; it doesn't age. Your heart doesn't age, spiritual gifts don't age, and your passion doesn't age. It doesn't matter how old we get as women; we're always going to be influencing others and

leading others if we realize it's really all about the heart."  
[Sherri H.]

- ❖ Understand the fundamentals of the financials of your business. "That is so important for every woman to understand. And if you want to be successful, you've got to be able to read a Profit & Loss statement and a balance sheet, and do forecasting. You can't just hope it all works out and think, *Well, I must have made money because I've got money in the bank*, because that's not the way that works." [Eleanor M.]
- ❖ "When you have a gut feeling, you know what the Lord's telling you to do. Don't let someone else convince you otherwise ... just because you think he or she is smarter or has a bigger title behind his or her name. Go with what you feel." [Deena R.]
- ❖ You've been designed by God for a purpose—his purpose. "If you figure that out with your God, he will use you in such a powerful way. And this is in every place in your life —in your home, in your community, in your church, and in your work. God will use you if you let him put 'the way you are designed' to work" [Cheryl B.].
- ❖ Your calling is between you and God alone. "You do not need to respond to or live by all these other voices. Jesus says, 'Take up your mantle; follow me.' He didn't say, 'Check in with the sixteen people in your community who have an opinion about you.' He didn't say anything about that. He even said those really difficult words. 'What if you have to turn from your family to follow me?' And I don't want to do that, but he made it really clear that 'Follow me' is the first, foremost, the most important thing" [Cheryl B.].
- ❖ "Your public life is only as strong as your private world. Don't be deceived by the dragon of success because it can eat you alive *if* your private world is not in order. However, if your private world is in order, then enjoy the success; enjoy the fruit. But always know that who you are is more important to God than what you do. Because ultimately, your character, your essence of being, is what he loves" [Lori S.M.].





## What They Wish They Had Known at the Beginning of Their Careers

- ❖ Understand the importance of balancing your work, family, and marriage. “I [Eleanor M.] would have liked somebody to come along beside me and say, ‘Eleanor, you know, it’s not all about work just because you have this opportunity. You’ve got to look at your family, you’ve got to look at your marriage, you’ve got to look at everything, and you’ve got to balance that somehow.’ I never had that person until I really had kind of figured it out on my own.”
- ❖ Be humble and willing to learn, course-correct, and dream big. “Also, it’s super cliché, but if your dreams don’t scare you, they’re not big enough. And I am not a dreamer. I’m not. I’m learning to be, because I’m learning that God has bigger things for me than I could have imagined for myself, so why limit him?” [Shannon M.].
- ❖ Be very careful with whom you surround yourself. “There are some friends and associations I’ve had whom I literally have had to let go of because they didn’t serve me and my vision. If they’re discouraging and negative, they can really hold us back from all God wants us to be and do” [Sherri



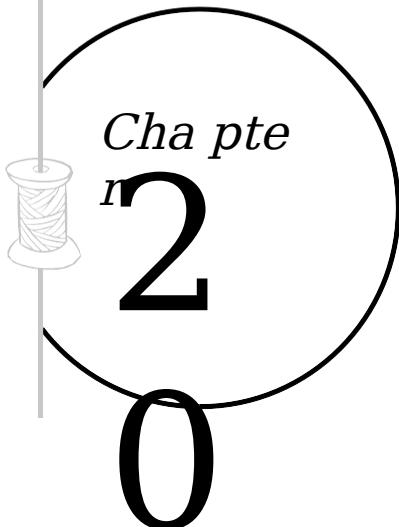
- ❖ Take advice from Mother Teresa: “Truly, truly pray and what you hear, obey.” This has everything to do with your relationships, leadership, and business. [Lori S.M.]
- ❖ Keep important truths in mind. “I would probably like to have known that women can be just as good a leader as a man. I remember thinking a lot of times, *Well, I'm probably not going to get this, but I'm going to apply anyway*. And again, in my day and age, women were never expected to get those opportunities. I would like to have known that I had just as good—and actually better—a chance because I always say women are multitaskers, and men aren't” [Deena R.].
- ❖ Be prepared to fail. “I wish I had been more comfortable with failing ... more aware that great leaders always have lots of failures in their past ... the whole ‘Babe Ruth struck out more times than he hit’ and ‘Abe Lincoln lost more elections than he won’ principle” [Beth H.].
- ❖ Intentionally surround yourself with like-minded people. “I've really been very, very careful about being around those people who are like-minded, who do want to go with God and follow him and who really want to reach their fullest potential” [Sherri H.].
- ❖ Be faithful. “It's not about your happiness, comfort, or wonderfulness. It's about your faithfulness. Know at the end of the day, with all our scars, all our mistakes, all our sweat and tears, all the stupid things we've ever done, and all the good things we ever did, that God will say ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant’” [Lori S.M.].
- ❖ Realize just how amazing God is. “You know, he can make beauty out of messes—and I've had a few messes—and he redeems all of our snafus, all of our bad judgements, all of our selfishness, because he's up to something so much bigger than what we are up to” [Cheryl B.].
- ❖ Know yourself. “Go through personality testing and spiritual gifts testing, and ask those who know you well enough to tell you the truth. Once you know your strengths, pour more and more energy and development into these strengths. Start off

from an area you are gifted in and then seek out the best and brightest in those areas and unabashedly ask them for mentoring help. Study their work and ask them to critique your work" [Cheryl B.].

- ❖ Know the importance of having somebody who believes in you. "You've got to have people in your corner who support you. And it's funny; when you put it out there, you find them" [Shannon M.].
- ❖ Realize that it all centers on what your passions, wiring, and gifts are. "Everybody is gifted by God, and it's unique. And he or she needs to try to tap into that. And it's not always easy to figure that out. But I would spend a lot of time and energy to figure that out" [Cynthia B.K.].
- ❖ Accept that no one is good at everything and that well roundedness can be overrated. "I spent too much time trying to shore up my areas of weakness rather than feeding my areas of strength that can lead you to being the best of the best" [Beth H.].
- ❖ Accept that nothing is permanent. "I went twenty years before I went back to school. I had completely given up the idea that I would become a therapist, and yet it happened. I think that's it. If I had known that, yes, I'm not going to be an astronaut, but doors that are closed at one point may not remain so. That's an important thing to know" [Cheryl D.J.].
- ❖ Understand that you need good business sense. "Even if you are in ministry (the seminary degree is only half of what you need), learn how to run an organization and get training in business management and business finances" [Lori S.M.].
- ❖ Be what God made you. "When I got to college, I looked around at all these other salutatorians and valedictorians. And I thought, *I must just be average*. And I wasn't, you know? And if I had had somebody say, 'Just don't listen to that. You operate in your own strength and don't get into that comparison mind-set because you will then talk yourself into not being what God can make you'" [Janet W.B.].

- ❖ Seek to have more confidence. “I think, particularly being a woman, we have a tendency to think that we’re not good enough” [Janet W.B.].
- ❖ Know and have the courage to ask for what you want.
- ❖ Operate from the power of God versus your own ability.
- ❖ Surround yourself with people who can mentor you in your growth.
- ❖ Accept that trying to do everything on our own is futile. “Find somebody who’s going to be in your corner; just know it’s going to change over time as God progresses you through your career” [Shannon M.].
- ❖ Learn that worrying is useless. “I’m still working on this: ‘What if I stopped worrying so much and just trust in him?’ You can’t scripturally be worried and trust God at the same time. And I’m a really good worrier. But yet, what if we just let it go? How powerful that could be if we could just be free to let God rule and worry less daily” [Cheryl B.].
- ❖ Accept that you are not going to be good at everything. Know yourself. Go through personality testing and spiritual gifts testing, and ask those who know you well enough to tell you the truth.





## So What's Next?

Oddly, this has been the hardest part of the book to write. There are so many options for what could be next and how to go about bringing this wisdom into your own business, work, and calling. All the ideas, except where noted, come from the collective wisdom in *Threads*.

Here are some next-step ideas that can leverage your success (read: eternal significance) in your work.

- ✓ Get a mentor. Really. Pray for one and ask God to choose the perfect one for you. And then pay attention to who shows up, preferably a Christian professional woman so you are equally yoked. Seek one out; *ask* someone. Don't think she is too high level or busy. What is the worst she can say? No? But if she says yes, you will have someone worth her weight in gold.
- ✓ Get a cheerleader. If you don't have or want a mentor, get a cheerleader and stay in touch weekly. This could be your colleague, sister, brother, mother, or best friend. This is anyone who believes in you, has Christian morals and values, and will tell you the truth.

- ✓ Get an accountability partner. (This could be your mentor or cheerleader or someone completely separate). You can have

one of these partners for *any* area of your life: your prayer life, role as a wife, responsibility as a mom, behavior change, or by subject. My accountant and I did this for months; she would hold me accountable to very specific financial goals, and I held her accountable to a list of business goals she wanted to push through.

- ✓ Invest in your Christian leadership. Frankly, leadership development skills are good, but what's better is developing Christian leadership skills. There are many online college, church, or parachurch leadership programs based on Christian principles (meaning Jesus Christ is at the center of it). Don't go second class on this one; learn from the best, the ones that are theologically sound (versus prosperity gospel, success gospel, me gospel, and so forth).
- ✓ Join a professional Christian organization. How great would it be to surround yourself with professional, faith-based, like-minded men and women?
  - General mixed professional organizations (Christian Business Network, Christian Business Fellowship Association, and so forth)<sup>a</sup>
  - Industry-specific professional organizations (Christian Educators International Association, Christian Medical and Dental Association, Association of Christian Librarians, and so forth)<sup>a</sup>
  - Women-only professional organizations (Christian Professional Women's Association, National Association of Christian Women in Business, National Association of Christian Women Entrepreneurs, and so forth)<sup>a</sup>
- ✓ Join a Christian executive roundtable. In the past, this was reserved for the top executives or CEOs of organizations, but today there are a myriad of options for a roundtable of peers. Why? To sharpen you, your skills, and your knowledge and give you objective feedback. First choice is a *Christian* roundtable, but if you can get into any roundtable, you can stop-gap that with a Christian mentor or coach. Some leaders in this area include the following: Convene, C12 Group and

TruthAtWork.<sup>a</sup>

- ✓ Look at employing a Christian certified coach. If you are going through a major transition, need to find your calling, want to move from one level to the next in a company, or need to take or launch your business or any organization to the next level—or need to shift or recalibrate to integrate your faith to be at the core of it—consider hiring a Christian coach (who has some level of certification). The coach's purpose is to move you from where you are to where you want to be, all with Christ at the center of it (hopefully). Please vet very carefully. You can find certified coaches; search online. Often the best way to find a coach is to ask your own network.
- ✓ Consistently pray over your work, position, company, and calling. It may sound obvious, but consistently submit your work, project, or position to God, praying about it and seeking God's will in it. This pursuit will reap much reward. Some of the reasons we found are that it reminds us we are not alone, that we have a mighty Father who protects us, and that we are not the driver but the passenger. It reminds us to be humble and thankful, and to be Christ to those we work with.

Even pray over your daily task list. Pray before each meeting, each phone call. Do it. Consistently watch our awesome God at work. He *is* a God of details.

### *a d d i T i o n a L   T h o u g h T S   F r o m   T h e a u T h o r*

- ✓ Go to seminary. I know, you're thinking, *Caroline, you have lost your mind. Seminary is not for me. I'm in business. And I'm not that holy.* Well, let me tell you, seminary is *not* for "the holy" or just for people in ministry. It's for all people of faith, and we are *all* in ministry. Yes, it's for women—yes, I said *women*. And it's for women like you and me.

FYI: I go to a seminary at night once a week for three

hours here in Atlanta. And I know you know there are seminaries online, right? So why did I suggest it? It will forever change your view, your relationship with God, the world, and your

work. You will be given new eyes. Do so sooner rather than later. But later is better than not at all. (I'm attending it at the ripe old age of fifty-five.)

- ✓ Start a *Threads* group. Maybe the wisdom and ideas in this book have you yearning for a professional group of your own, but other types of groups aren't appealing or not available in your area. What if you had a *Threads* group of women who collaborated, prayed together, and held you accountable? Keep reading ...

There is a very specific reason why I don't have a website, branding, and so forth professionally done when this book was written. I have many times run ahead of God in regard to having a vision versus listening and following his lead. If this serves the Lord and Christian businesswomen now, at this time, and it is his will, so be it. Amen.

"Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord" (Psalm 27:14 NIV).

Until then, you can reach me at [threadwisdom@bellsouth.net](mailto:threadwisdom@bellsouth.net) or 678-361-6040 (cell number; please use judiciously).



<sup>a</sup> Please note that mentioning these organizations is for reference purposes only versus recommendations. Please do your own research and vetting.

## *A b o u t t h e A u t h o r*



Caroline Mendez is a disciple of Jesus Christ, wife, mother, businesswoman, and advocate of Christian working women, and pioneer of Christian women in leadership.

Caroline spent twenty-one years in corporate America, starting in the mail room and working her way up to executive management positions in the high-tech industry with software manufacturers and system integration firms. Over the past eighteen years, she professionally coached hundreds of executives, and their teams, and facilitated numerous CEOs in monthly executive roundtables.

Since 2006, she has been challenging and serving Christian women executives and business leaders of companies and nonprofits in Metro Atlanta to bring glory to God in their work.

Caroline A. Mendez is an Ordained Minister, businesswoman, wife, mother, Kingdom catalyst, and pioneer in the advocacy for Christian women in leadership. Her passion is developing a level playing field in the marketplace and the Christian community at large, so women can live out their callings, as unto the Lord.





What if you could interview top Christian women leaders and ask their advice on how to be “successful” (eternally significant) and glorify God with your work?

THREADS documents the journeys and best advice of ten women that lead marketplace and non-profit organizations, in their own words.



- **Discover** the nine unique attributes these faithful women leaders all have in common
- **Follow** their paths to leadership
- **Learn** the most powerful lessons from their mentors
- **Uncover** the specific ways they learned leadership
- **Study** their management approaches and philosophies
- **Find out** who influenced their leadership most
- **Observe and consider** their faith at work practices
- **Gain** insight into what they have known at the beginning of their careers
- **Hear** what they want other businesswomen to know

***Wisdom and advice FROM Christian  
businesswomen, TO Christian businesswomen***



U.S.